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# quad 2004

birmingham-southern college's primere literary arts magazine





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Polaroid photography done by Zachary Gibson and Erin Robbins, but inspired by Elizabeth Frye. All other images were produced using Adobe Photoshop 7.

### Music

New to the Quad this year is a compilation music CD (conveniently located at the back of the magazine) featuring BSC-based bands including:

The Gilded Culture
Love's Divinity
Ben Marsh

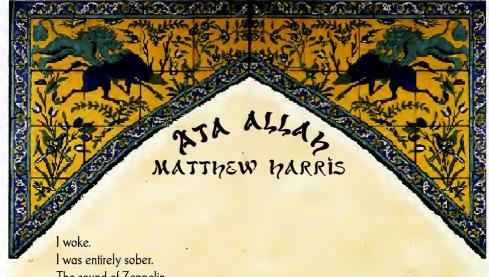
The Danger of Seatbelts
The White Routine
The Shut-Ins
Shelton

Swiss Bank Account ...and more!

My Night With the Gypsies Chris Adkins

Dublin
Andy's Tea Party

for john seay



I was entirely sober.
The sound of Zeppelin
Lauding oriental wonders,
A typical warm spring morning,
Sunlight traversing the plastic blinds
Was obscured.

In my neat, white-tiled, standard, modern
University domicile,
Surly eyes glared above me
Nostrils flared in ire.
Bells and silken gaud
Tawdry golden shag
In the center of my room

An Arabian camel, Considering me-Pit stains and Worn out briefs, Intruder.

His smell forced itself
Upon me, appalling.
The stench of waste, rotted
Blood and pus on his sandy feet.
Yellow teeth bared,
ponderous dromedary
Bawled his wrath

And calmly staled on my mass-made, untassled Persian floor rug.

Lawrence glowered, Princely on the shelf. Seven Pillars springing forth And spring I did.

On my feet
Old white blood welled
No emir, imam, sheik, sherif, bey, mufti
Or punk-ugly reeking, pissing camel
Was welcome.

Open door
Indignantly debarredHand flung out in righteous zeal,
I mightily bellowed my retort,
Grandly waving a nearby broom.

But he moved not an inch,
Snorting, pawing my floor.
He secreted himself into
Every inch of my place.
And I hurried out.

Awkward bowing,
Shamed.
Evicted into the sterile
Fluorescent light
Of the hallway.
And I never went back.



## Stained Feet Aarti Madan

She lumbers in with the weight of ornate embroidery and forced love bending her back and soul.

Sita's black eyes veiled with red silk, theirs with culture, so no one sees her shuffled gait skip-what if?

What if she screamed

"fuck all of you" and gathered yards of gilded cloth from her henna stained feet and clicked them twice?

Wishes to be a fictitious character unfulfilled, so she trudges in her sari sobbing internally, aware of the grapefruit in her throat that chokes her like her mother's unfaltering stare.

Her Walgreens' nametag reads "Jenny." She smells like smoke and Wind Song, her teeth yellowed from coffee and cigarette tar. She wears white nurse's tennis shoes scuffed and stained with blacks and browns and greens.

### Jenny David Feltman

Her blonde hair, faded white,
is pulled back in a tight bun
with a broken pink plastic hair pin.
Jenny paces under the fluorescent light
behind the drugstore, speaking in hushed tones
into the cell phone pressed against her ear,
a Marlboro red pursed between her lips.
Jenny puts her hand over the receiver
and coughs two, three times.

She takes another drag from her cigarette
"No you can't watch.

I'll deal with him when l...
Look, just finish your homework
and I'll handle it when I get home.
OK, love you

too, bye." She sighs

and slips the phone in the pocket of her tight white uniform, crushes the lipstick stained butt with her toe and shuffles back through the automatic glass doors. She brushes a loose strand of hair behind her ear and steps behind the second cash register. Jenny sighs again and smiles at the approaching customer. "Hi, welcome to Walgreens."





## Temporary Like Achilles Matt Green

It's January, and the world is monochromatic, all bare trees and gray grass. Even the brick of the house, statue-like, is stark and colorless, a hint of white and taupe; everything blends with the smoke-bomb sky.

"Help me out."

Dad's wrestling a hospital bed out of the back of a shiny silver Chevy truck. It's man versus machine, and though dad's forearms are thicker than the frame and mattress combined, he is losing the battle.

"Hurry up."

I speed up my walk, arriving just before defeat, and grip the metal frame. The cold metal burns my hands at first, but halfway up the front porch steps, the numbing effect sets in. We're inside, now the hard part. I begin walking backwards up the stained wooden stairs, bending over to keep the bed level with my dad who is four or five steps behind. I'm sure I look like an ostrich pecking the sand over for food. We finally make it to the top and roll the bed into the middle of the playroom.

"Is this spot okay, Mamaw?"

\*\*\*

I'm sitting in the Muscle Shoals police station with my friend Ryan, and we are being questioned by my old Little League baseball coach turned head detective, Keith Kennedy. On his desk are a few pictures: his wife, whose black hair appears to be a nest or hiding place for small animals; his father (I'm guessing by the resemblance of the piglike nose); and our team, the Phillies, sporting faded pink jerseys cleverly printed with blazing blue stars dotting the "i's." Keith has increased his intake since that photograph was taken a little over two years ago. With a green shirt, white overalls, and a conductor's hat, he would look just like Luigi from Super Mario Brothers. At baseball practices, I would imagine one of those spiky turtle things falling on his head, transforming him into a diminutive, but no less heroic, Luigi. "Here it comes, Green," he would shout in a pre-pubescent tone before sending a slow roller my way. Now, however, his tone was heavier.

"So how exactly did you guys make the bombs?"

"A two-liter bottle, aluminum foil, and The Works," Ryan says.

"The Works? Like Clorox?"

"Yes sir. Just shake it up and give it about thirty seconds."

"And who came up with this formula?"

"I'm not sure." I shrug my shoulders, content to let Ryan talk.

"OK. Well, I have to go through this list of names with you two. Just give me a yes or no."

"Chad Bourland."

"Yes."

"Jody Benson."

"Yes."

"Nick Underwood and David Gargis."

"Yes."

"Kyle Rone and Brett Kaplan."

"No," I speak up. I'm lying.

"You sure?"

"Yes sir."

He rattles off the twenty some-odd other names, and we respond "yes."

"OK. Now five people have pressed charges..."

"Keith," my dad sticks his head in the door, "sorry to do this but Matt's got to go. He has a basketball game."

"Varsity, right?" Keith asks.

"Yes sir."

"Good luck."

Mamaw doesn't get up too often. She just lies in her hospital bed in the middle of our playroom and watches CNN. The only times she gets up are either to use the bathroom or to receive a bath from mom. She can't walk by herself, though, so dad and I have to carry her, on both sides, her arms wrapped around our necks, our arms wrapped around her waist; it seems the only logical way to do this. She'll sit up in bed, we'll crouch down so she can put her arms around our necks, then lift her up. Luckily, she can put some weight on her feet because without that I'm not sure we could carry her.

\*\*\*

Whenever we employ this maneuver, her scabby arm skin scrapes against the back of my neck, feeling like the shed skin of a snake, and though she's quit smoking, her hand smells like a cigarette as it dangles limp in my face. Her fingers are yellowed from the smoking, almost brown, but her fingernails are like those of a queen, filed to perfection and lacquered to their ivory tips. Stiff, brittle hair, grayed at the scalp, puffs out from her head like a cloud of smoke and pokes against my cheek. She wheezes with each step until we reach the gleaming, white bathroom where mom is kneeling down, turning the

steamy water off with rubber-glove hands.

"Thanks." Mom says this every time we help.

Dad nods his head, and I follow him downstairs to continue watching whatever the game of the day is.

#### BOOM!!!SKREEEE!!!BOOM!!!

"Did you see that mailbox? That was fucking awesome!" Ryan yells as we drive away, leaving nothing but a cloud of smoke behind. "Green, you got to do one."

"Alright man. Just wait 'til we get to another neighborhood."

That is the tenth mailbox we have blown up tonight. Evan has graciously driven us around all night in his Stratus, known to us as the Strat-Ass, and the comfort of the backseat has kept me there.



4 or 5 pieces of aluminum foil pieces of al relied up like a cigarette a cigarette a cigarette allows for the most destruction.

- tion "OK Green

"Alright Green. Your turn. Who do you want to get?" Ryan says as he passes back the ingredients.

"Whoever, man."

I take the ingredients from him, set them in my lap, and start playing mad scientist. There is, in some ways, an art to doing this. If you get too much Works in the 2-liter bottle, then the bomb may go off too early. Three good squirts should do the trick. And if you get too much aluminum foil in the bottle, then the bomb will not pack as much power. Four or five pieces of aluminum foil rolled up like a cigarette allows for the most

"OK, Green. We're here."

Evan stops the car at a four-way stop and I hop out of the car, bottle in hand. They take a left and I'm left alone, an assassin, ready for the worst, hoping for the best. I turn around to find the Strat-Ass stopped a few lawns down, facing me so they can view the damage. What if it goes off too early in my hand? What if someone sees me and runs out to the mailbox just as the bomb goes off? Don't be such a pussy, Green!

The ground outside is already frosted over for the night, and one street light stands glaring at the dead end. I screw the cap on and begin shaking the bottle as I walk up to the mailbox. Usually you have about thirty seconds after shaking before the bomb explodes. As I close in on the mailbox, I notice that it's a wooden red barn, complete with a loft and white X's on the front doors. The pole it sits on is painted brown and rotting on the sides. I open the front doors, shove the bomb in, and run for the car about fifty feet away. I find my place in the backseat and just as I turn to see it, BOOM, the roof of the barn flies twenty feet in the air. It looks like fireworks, the big, expensive kind, and we are the neighborhood kids who have come out to catch the show.

Evan peels out, shooting grass and mud from the rear, and we all scream and laugh. Looking out the window, I see the pieces of the mailbox scattered throughout the street.

"That was the best one yet, Green," Ryan says.

"You think?"

"Hell yeah."

I tilt my head back and grin at the grey interior.

"You're right."

Today I didn't even have to use my A-K. I gotta' say it was a good day. Coo- Whaa.

lce Cube's on the player, and Ben and I are trying to rhyme along as we motor down Avalon Avenue, home to Muscle Shoals High School and assorted banks and churches. Ben spits quicker than I do and sounds decent but squeaky. I, on the other hand, can't master the art of inhaling and exhaling well enough to keep up, fumbling over rhymes like a tongue twister. But this is my game-day music. Nothing other than Ice Cube's *The Predator* can thud and thump from my Explorer's factory speakers when basketball is at hand.

"Man, your mom  $\_$  "His sentence is engulfed by the booming. I turn the stereo down.

"What?"

"Your mom's behind us."

My rearview mirror reveals my mom flicking her headlights on and off, speeding to catch us. I veer over into the First Baptist Church parking lot, and mom follows. She scuttles out of her Grand Cherokee and up to my side of the car. She's wild-eyed and taking longer strides than her short, stumpy legs should allow. My window is already

down, and the music has been silenced.

"Go to your dad's office. I've been looking all over for you."

"Why?"

"I don't know what you've done, but you need to go to your dad's now."

"What's going on?" I knew what was going on.

"The police called your dad. Just get down there. Now."

Her body blots out almost all of the immense, yellow aluminum church behind her. The only parts of it I can see are the front two top corners that jut out of my mother's head and connect to her shoulders like a Transformer.

"Alright," I say while rolling up the window.

"Shit, man."

"How did they find out so soon?" Ben says pushing his fingers through his bushy red hair.

"I don't fucking know... I'll just run you by the gym."

"OK."

I pull out of the parking lot, cross Avalon, and pull up next to the gym.

"See you later, Green."

"Hopefully," I say half-joking.

The trip to dad's used-car business is blurry except for the route. Left onto Avalon, left onto Woodward, dad's place on the right. The banks, churches, and fast-food restaurants all coalesce to form an abstract against the misty winter sky. As I pull into the family business, dad is standing underneath the pine-colored awning, leaning against the crimson brick. His button-down shirt matches the brick, and as I creep past him, it looks like his head and hands are floating above his lower half. The buoyant, plump hand rises and points me to the back of the lot. By the time I park my car next to his shiny, silver Chevy truck, he's already locked into the driver's seat with the passenger side window rolled down. I get out and stall for a second, bending down to tie the shoelaces of my bright blue New Balances'. They look like a fresh black eye pressed up against the asphalt. From the Chevy, my dad's growl is muffled but audible.

"Get in the fucking car now."

It's the first time I have ever heard my dad say "fuck."

The drone of fans falls on my ears as I advance the ball past half-court with eighteen seconds left in the second quarter. My defender is short and skinny with shaved brown hair. His eyes focus in on my waist, following each shimmy and shake. I cross-over

to avoid his slapping hands then pass the ball to Bradley on the wing. Bradley puts up a shot from the corner, but his defender blocks it out of bounds. Suddenly my mind drifts from the game when I see Officer Garrett retrieving Evan and Chad from the bleachers. The drone of the student section fades out, and the squeak of finished wood and athletic shoes increases. Evan and Chad walk out of the gym on either side of Officer Garrett, his black uniform dividing the two as they pass through the swinging red doors.

Bradley passes the ball in to me at the top of the key, and I'm back. I hoist up a

three-pointer that clanks around the rim a few times before falling into the hands of the opposing team. They quickly push the ball up the floor for the final shot of the half. My defender flings the ball from half-court right as the buzzer sounds, clanging the ball against the glass backboard.

Jogging off the court, I feel like everyone is staring at me, a million beady, black eyes beaming right through the "20" on my jersey. I think it's because I missed the shot. Surely, it's because I missed the shot.



I lock my eyes on the Road, the infinity of yellow lines ... zooming us into the future.

I meet Jenny behind Arby's on Woodward, the main street in Muscle Shoals. She climbs out of her black Explorer and makes her way over to mine; we have the same car. I turn this into a sign to compensate for the real reasons we are meeting behind a fast food restaurant at one on a Saturday morning. For some reason, part of me wants this to be love. But the other part of me knows that this is my ex-girlfriend's best friend.

She gets into my car and kisses me on the cheek.

"Where should we go?" she asks.

"I figured you would know."

"Funny...Just go out on Sixth Street somewhere."

"Ok."

I take a left onto Woodward, and we are off to meet our destiny with Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* serving as our soundtrack.

"This song's great you know."

"What is it?"

"Fourth Time Around.' Dylan can just rhyme so many words in one verse without sounding silly. It's amazing you know." She slides her hand onto my thigh.

"Yeah it is." Her hand begins moving around.

"If I could only write one song this good. Id be happy." Is her hand really there?
"I'm sure you would."

I lock my eyes on the road, the infinity of yellow lines in perpetual flash mode, zooming us into the future. We take a left onto Sixth and drive out a few miles.

"Pull off here. I think you can get pretty far from the road."

I drive the Explorer out half a mile and leave it running. Jenny has already crawled into the backseat and let it down. Outside the car, it is pitch black.

"Come on."

"Hang on."

I undo my seatbelt, take off my coat, and maneuver into the back. The onslaught of tongue is immediate and only gets sloppier by the minute. Our mouths lose grip only for a moment so she can tear her pink J. Crew sweater off. We are young, vivacious, fumbling around on top of one another, pretending we know what we're doing. She loosens my belt.

Look at me. I've blown up mailboxes, am vigorously involved with an eighteen-year old who just happens to be the president of our high school. This is how a sixteen-year old should be. Alive, bursting, replete...I wonder what my buddies are doing right now. Probably playing some ridiculous board game, usually Taboo. You know, the one where there are certain words you can't use as clues in order to guess another word...I am voracious, inevitable, I will never lie in hospital beds. I want it all. Nothing can stop me. I am the most...

The car is quiet except for Dylan's "Temporary like Achilles." I straighten my pants and belt and push the backseat up while Jenny fixes her shirt. I climb into the front and pull the car out of the withered cotton field. As we drive back down Sixth Street, the broken yellow lines pass by in increments.

"What's wrong with Mamaw?" I overhear Jordan asking mom in the kitchen



The boson hisses and pops as Mom tries to formulate an answer Jordan can understand

downstairs. I stop and stand, leaning over the stained wooden guardrail for maximum hearing ability.

"Well, baby, her surgery just didn't go right."

"What kind of surgery?"

"Gallbladder surgery."

"What's that?"

I look down at my silver Fossil watch. It's 7:30, thirty minutes before school. The bacon hisses and pops as mom tries to formulate an answer Jordan can understand.

"It's an organ in your body that stores things up like an animal gathers food for the winter."

"Is she going to die?"

"We hope not, baby. She's staying with us to get better."

"Is she gonna stay with us forever?"

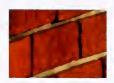
"No, just long enough to get her feeling better."

My grandmother's snore steals up my neck and into my ears, breaking my concentration and drawing me in like a siren song. I float back to her room, and she is sleeping in her hospital bed. Jordan has placed Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers on the carpet-

ed floor around the bed. All face outward like they are protectors, guardians of a queen. Her chest fluctuates from puffed and proud to sunken and subdued and back again. I stand next to her bed, gripping the cold, metal frame with my left hand, and watch the piston-like movement of her chest until a glitch in her snoring breaks the pattern. I reach out to hold her right hand in mine; her scaly skin drags against my soft, fleshy palm. My hand blankets her hand except for the ivory tips of her fingernails that extend past my pinky, suspended in the air and separated from us both.

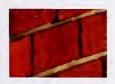






# Sonos About Hammers Taylor Moore

The houses in the desert were built by men Who danced and hammered like foreplay Coaxing the sand to the left, to the right, With buckets and shovels and song, They cried in the sun and slept uneasy shifts Under rocks, in the offices of cool air, with lizards Who would tell them where the next house should go. While the men slept, wet-red tongues would come creeping Out of darkness to scratch on their eardrums Put one there, put one here, use these plans and these blueprints Hard workers will sleep sound tomorrow. Build us a city, with warm rocks and a fountain With houses carved out of limestone Streets made of sand and dusty red sidewalks Where only us lizards can go. And so the men danced, from drywall to plumbing From upstairs to downstairs to basement And sang with their hammers and buckets of sand Songs about whispering lizards, Songs about hammers and joys of hard work Paychecks and hunting and love Songs about women and sex and cold beer in mugs and on porches on Fridays But only whispered in secret of what lizards had said, Of escape and the promise of highways.





### "Stand, Alesia!"

### Daniel P. Strandlund

Vercingetorix led his Celts to the east and Alesia,
And here, now, he must stand
Against the ten-mile noose of Roman phalanx.
He stands on Alesia's cracking walls, above the wet reek of yesterday's battle.
They are mostly farmers and craftsmen,
Five dead to every Roman.
His warriors had done well, but they were
Trampled by the chaos of fishermen and carpenters
Who shit themselves at the sight of Roman cavalry.
Now crushed and skewered bodies of his soldiers rot in the sun,
Pus and blood lapped by scavenging fort-dogs.
He watches them, hoping they'll come home soon;

Victory had been close at coruscating Avaricum.

The Bituriges should have sacrificed their home along with the twenty other Celtic cities burned to starve Gaius Julius Caesar from Gaul.

Stubborn, jealous for power,
They sank at Vercingetorix's feet and begged him to yield.

Romans swarmed and fed,
Smothering, mechanized, direct as ants.

Now they wait for battle with full bellies while

Vercingetorix and his army stand

Ankle deep in the feces of children and slaughtered horses.

A horn sounds and the last free men of Alesia scream, Pounding breasts with knobby fists.

Mothers and wives sing for their husbands and sons
To save them from Roman penetration.

Starving children, empty-bellied and red-eyed, wait to be Snatched away by a pederast.

The graybeards and druids sharpen their knives, Ready to slit their own throats.

His people need the meat.

Vercingetorix mounts his stallion, blade aloft in salute to the Battle-green, free men who abandoned their ploughs to follow him. He orders the gates open and charges with Free Gaul behind him. Overhead, buzzards and ravens wait, watching.



His stallion's hooves sloshing muck.
He thinks how many could have fed off his horse.
A scarlet cloak wags in the distance, Caesar's.
One quick squeeze of his legs, and
The brushed flanks of his horse ripple.
Vercingetorix flies toward the Roman command tent.
He shines like fired coal.
Gold flashes from rings and the hilt of his dagger;
A spiraled bronze shield replaces his battled one;
A polished hurling spear rises cocked, and
His two handed sword lies waiting at his side.
He can see Caesar on a stool.

Vercingetorix rides alone to surrender,

Roman legionaries crowd to protect their general.

The wild Gaul howls, reigning his steed to paw the air with its hooves.

He hurls his spear at the general's feet, and

It quivers in the very dirt which Vercingetorix yields to white-knuckled Julius.

He's disgusted to relinquish his sword

To this impious twig whose balding skull he could crush in his palm.

In his own Gaelic he asks, "How did you do it little man?"

Julius sniffs, flustered, and orders him chained.

Guards taunt him from a distance,
Roman hands prod his muscles and rip clumps of his rufous hair.
The braver ones heft his genitals under his tunic, jealous and sneering.
Alesia will burn and his people enslaved or slaughtered.
As the general dragged him behind his chariot,
He would not scream, would not cry out for mercy,
Would not be broken.



## Untitled P. Alexander Scokel

Lethe-bound lover last of the line-venders
Two copper for the ferry begs the boatman
Two copper for the ferry trip to ashen shores
A ship to dip a boat to float across the river Lethe
To know you know that no one knows
And flow away from me far from me away
Two copper and the river Styx stands still

A sip to cross a ship to cross a cross to cross
And no one knows you know me knowing
The tapestry the Gods are sewing shut and stuffing
With words of Vonnegut and witty Walt
Two copper for the man to copy pages lined in gold
And sold to no one who knows no thing
For a pint of gold and bags of gold a ship of gold

Grains of sand form grainy land to land on
The shore aside the river moor aside the river
Across the river flowing loading boats of gold
You see me eating seaweed shiver drinking
Sea-bound land locked lost and lonely loveless
Two copper and a page of rhymes easily forget
And know you know, no, you know

The coins of copper in your irised eyes
The boat with no glass bottom has no bottom
Sinking between the boards the boat sinks
Water seeps soaks your ankle socks and sops
The sockets of the skull and drips to drop
To know you know no niche to go the water flows
Fills the steel you feel the stillness death

### Cerulean Shatters Hillary Ballant

Rob carefully breaks through the cardboard perforation, revealing a four tiered rainbow of perfectly molded wax.

After much pondering, he pinches his forefinger and thumb around the tip of his chosen beauty: Cerulean.

He strokes her thin figure and presses her virgin tip firmly on the uncoated paper, its surface a weblike mass of fibers.

Cool blue hues melt into a pool of familiarity. Rob's strokes become harder, the cerulean point now a shapeless mound.

Fibers act as a file, wearing away pigment particles, holding them deep within its webbing.

He peels away a small strip of her paper, sharpening the dome into a useable form once again.

Scribbling an angry sea, Rob wears down the cerulean tip,





sharpens, reshapes, repeats.

Waves crash on the page; cerulean winds race across the sky; Rob scrapes the wax faster and faster

Until he peels back the last remnant of skin, bears down hard with the remains of a point, and the cerulean beauty shatters.



### No Spaces in Rainbows

### Meredith Hanson

#### There

sheltered beneath
the broad umbrella trees,
gazing towards
prism sunsets,
flaming roses,
upside down Orion,
clearer ways
to walk
down dusty roads
beside clovered ground

### People

Julio, JuanLuis,
Maria, Fernando,
and their dark
hair, skin, eyes,
crooked teeth,
perfect smiles
afraid, and shy
giving of too many
seconds, in too many
moments,
dirty knuckles,
and laughing eyes

#### Seemed

breathed onions, smelled warm, cried dustiness, carried themselves, whispered soft silences, remembered sundays,



worked ravenously, dreamed simply, lived

#### Different

drinking boiled milk and boxed pineapple juice with rolling voices, mysterious tones that carry hidden secrets, amores, days, schedules, chistes, and favorites

#### Except

in actuality
we felt, however
it might have
appeared
that the true
being,
clarity,
likeness was
found

#### When

on those daily
occasions,
onces, in casual
complicated dinner
discussions,
with hammers,
pick axes, paint brushes, and
lawnmowers,
stick shift lessons with
the same gears
and forgotten lyrics with the same
meanings, the same
notes









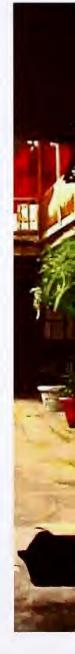
### They

themlarge women on small bicycles, frail men in oversized suits, pigtailed hijas covered in freckles, ussun burned boys with overused power tools, hankerchief girls with no mascara, or maybe bothall

### Laughed

loud, rich
smelling like breakfast, desayuno
whispering the
magic of evening's
lingering dusk,
grasping to clovers,
truths about being lost,
Pinochet
and pesos,
laughter
such a
sweet sound of
comprehension.





## Golden Cannonball

#### Jillian Greer

When my grandfather died, I did not care one iota-not a single one. One morning of my freshman year of high school, the last day of school before Christmas break, my mother told my brothers and sisters and me that she had something important to share with us. I don't think I bothered even to sit on the couch with the rest of my family, and I didn't give my mother a chance to finish her news. I said, "Grandfather's dead, isn't he?"

As my mother affirmed my statement-question, I sat for five seconds to consider my father's feelings, and I left for school. I don't think I gave it much more thought than that, although several years later, I would, precisely because I couldn't reconcile my grandfather's personality with the grandfatherly love I should have had. The question, which would later underscore both, was whether I had always loved him at least on a basic level I would not acknowledge for several years.

At the time of his death, however, other than the unfortunate seasonal timing-as Christmas inevitably reminds everyone of his departure-no one was particularly



PRIOR to his death, he was Albeady a skeleton...

surprised he passed away, and I personally was relieved. My grandfather had been dying for over a year by then, either in the hospital or in his hospitalized room, which to this day I feel uncomfortable in, especially in the bathroom with support bars around the toilet and shower seats gathering dust. On the not-so-special Valentine's Day ten months prior to his death, he was already a skeleton in a hospital bed, and I had been crying not for him but for the fact that I got to top yet another lonely and depressing Valentine's Day with a visit to a cranky old man with bed sores who loudly berated my eager-to-please

grandmother. She was and is one who loves to make sure we always have gummy sharks and Oreo's at every visit, and I hated to hear her criticized. To ignore the current situation I had wished with all my heart to not partake in, I had a new hair drier and a pocket full of Dove chocolates from my mom to fidget with in the back of the hospital room. Focusing on them gave me hope that I wouldn't have to hear my grandfather ask my mom again if I had yet "become a woman" and gotten my period.

As my grandfather lay small and fragile beneath alaringly white blankets, which could not conceal his emaciated and sore-spotted leas, a memory appeared to me through the uncomfortable silence of the room such that my fingers ceased to move the chocolate in my coat pocket. My grandfather used to drive quite recklessly and speedily a Bonneville, which to this day I love for its maroon and almost velvet interior. Riding in the back and encased in velvet lining was a rare treat for a ten-year-old. On this occasion, however, as we swung into a median before a restaurant my parents were already pulling into, there was screaming. I glanced past my brother's face and through the window in time to see another car pull to a halt next to us, its driver linking his loud curses with insulting gestures. My grandfather, not one to concede fault in his driving, was not trying to assuage the man, but spurred him on with his own rendition of curses and gestures through my grandmother's passenger-side window, as she quietly begged him to stop. Aware that both cars were idling in the median, I became sure that at least one redfaced man would step out to follow curses with punches. And I feared the man to be hit would be my grandfather, not the younger man. Fortunately, our car moved first through a break in traffic to the restaurant, and I knew my waiting dad would be more apt at keeping both men at bay. The sound of my grandfather's rage juxtaposed to his now frail hospital body deceived me into believing he was not so ill or pained that he might not jump readily from his bed and voice his opinions over my grandmother's near-silent attempts to calm him.

Ten months after his Valentine's Day hospital stay, most, if not all, of my grandfather's funeral was actually pretty humorous. For one, he was cremated and put into a brass sphere we called the golden cannonball. Moreover, I'm pretty sure his ashes were just rolling in his cannonball at the fact that he was given a Catholic mass prior to his burial, given that he was a freemason, a group notorious for their dislike of the Catholic Church. In fact, my grandfather had been furious that my dad married a Catholic and was further enraged when the financially unprepared family became fruitful and multiplied. And if that weren't enough to make his ashes smolder, a secret my dad kept from him was that he had converted to Catholicism within the last year, hence the funeral mass. To add fuel to the ash fire, as we later joked on New Year's Eve with my dad and his friends shamelessly drunk, the ultimate in hysterically over-dignified and solemn burial

rites was performed by what looked to be a group of towering fat men, complete with hats and suits, wearing mini white aprons tucked beneath their ample stomachs, and dancing the freemason funeral chant over the golden cannonball, which had then been topped with my grandfather's mason fez. What the dance and chanting looked like was a group of stereotypical fat Mafiosi doing "I'm a Little Tea Pot" while ending each phrase with "So Mode it Be," which we abbreviated SMiB just before Dick Clark's "Rocking in the New Year" countdown. The funeral rites, including the burial of a fez-topped cannonball, were so ridiculous that they inspired the best drunken jokes I have ever heard (and probably shouldn't have) concerning hand gestures, sheep bestiality, and the repetition of SMiB after every "act."

While a part of me wanted to be absolutely appalled by the idea of anyone's grandfather, much less my own, being treated in such a way, the fact was that I was not attached to that man at all. What has to be understood in the case of David Joseph Greer is that he was a man who eschewed attachments in the first place. In fact, most knowledge of his personal and family history died with him, save for what my grandmother remembers from the distant past and is reluctant to tell for the sake of preserving Grandfather's privacy. Nonetheless, we know that he was born David Joseph Greetzman to a journeyman carpenter from Warsaw, Poland, and a woman who fled the beginnings of Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Somehow the two met around the first years of the new 20th century in the northern United States and birthed a New York non-practicing Jew and one or two other kids. My half-Russian, half-Polish grandfather had trouble getting a job with a last name indicating an ethnicity heavily discriminated against at the time, so he cut ties to the family name and changed to Greer. At some point, he got involved with the military, through friends and not as a draftee, which put him in Japan for a while in the early 1950's. As a hunter in his spare time and as an owner of a gun in a land where such weapons were restricted, he found himself aiding a poor family named Ban who had little food supply by bringing them what he killed for sport. Deeply gratified by his charity, they allowed him to marry their oldest child, who was nearly twenty years younger than he (In fact, my grandfather was at an age to make him a suitor for my great-grandmother, but she, of course, was married).

David brought Marii to the U.S., where they eventually settled down for a financially stringent and controlled life in Huntsville, Alabama. Certainly, my grandfather's penchant for never replacing that which could be hand-repaired (including a helplessly archaic coffee machine) induced my grandmother to become a QVC junkie when he died leaving most of his rigorously kept money to her. We recently debated blocking QVC on her television when a deliveryman dropped off a globe table and a new set of luggage. In terms of establishing a family, when my grandfather was in his early 50's, he

became the father of my father, and due to my grandmother's reproductive complications, only my father. Sometimes I believe that having not only one child, but also a male to carry on the family name, suited my grandfather's financial ideals just fine. I doubt my grandparents were ever really romantic anyway, as they spent their whole married life in separate beds. In fact, what I most remember my grandfather for was his gravelly yells of



I doubt my grandparents were Rebily ever Romantic... they spent their whole married life in Separate beds.

"Marii!" and resultantly, my grandmother's silent shuffle to do whatever he had curtly bid. Around the time of his confinement to his hospital bed in the house, "Marii!" seemed to come as if from a troll hiding in the dim back rooms. Add the rolling ground fog, and the image would have been complete.

Regardless of the image of my grandfather troll commanding my sweet grandmother, I must have loved my grandfather deeply at some point, since I vividly recall being photographed as pajama'ed, goofy-grinned, and running with books for him to read. I learned all of my nursery rhymes from him in his rocky voice and loved the repetition of that voice reading the

rhymes over and over to me. And although he was a freemason, he still attended the major religious rites in my life and even remarked on my First Communion how the dress my grandmother made for me was the prettiest one of all of the other dresses, even with my floppy bow. Before that particular mass, my grandmother and mother had pulled me aside to the kitchen and ceremoniously given me a thin, 14-carat-gold necklace doomed to several breaks in the future and the resulting loss of the small cross on it. I was warned several times not to tell my grandfather about the cross, as I knew that the necklace would reflect frivolous spending on my grandmother's part, though that aspect of my grandfather's personality did not bother me at the time. In retrospect, free secret gifts from my grandmother weren't too bad either, as she loved to please.

My grandfather also cultivated my love for the arts by paying my attendance to ballets and art classes. He was determined that I should grow up a properly cultured

woman of the arts and paint still-life fruit bowls, since I had no interest in or talent with musical instruments. Having quickly given up on ballet after viewing one performance, l was enrolled in art classes around the time I turned twelve, where he fully funded all charges of art supplies, which became extremely expensive. Becoming a woman of the arts did not draw me close to my grandfather, however. He, in fact, was beginning to become a repulsive, unapproachable old man who ranted at my little grandmother repeatedly in our presence and began to pry into my womanhood. When I was ten, we were forced to take him out to dinner-the one preceded by his scene with man he cut off, in fact-in order to inform him of my mother's pregnancy (which was already several months in the process) without his being able to rail on in fury. Around the time he started dying, my dad took one of my favorite paintings and gave it to my grandfather without asking for my consent. I was so indignant that that man got my best painting, I cried in the bathroom and shower for a selfishly long amount of time, and my vision was as red as the acrylic on the sky of my painting. I couldn't understand why we catered to a man who was so uncomfortable and difficult to be around. So I could laugh quite well about his golden cannonball when the time came, though I never went so far as to take back my painting when he was not around to possess it anymore.

One day not so long ago, my brother-David Joseph Greer II, that is-found and displayed a black-and-white photo of my grandfather dressed in hunting apparel sitting against a tree with his shotgun and dog. Inexplicably, the whole situation enraged me. How could that man love a dog? How could he deserve such a dramatic photograph, considering his lack of flair in his practicality-driven life? How could my brother steal that picture? Why was he honoring a man we weren't attached to? And why was he pretending to feel said attachment? I felt as if my brother were merely displaying a novelty, which to me was disrespectful, given that my grandfather would never allow himself to be viewed as a novelty but a force with which to be reckoned. As much as I disliked the man, I still respected his role as my grandfather, though not necessarily his personality. Around this time, my mother mentioned that she saw her father-in-law as a kind of hero. But I could not see how a man, who could critique relentlessly a sweet, subservient little Japanese lady, was a hero.

What began to alter my perceptions of the man was not my brother or mother, but instead a simple dream.

I am at my grandparent's house before my dad's hired renovations and grandmother's new money painted over the living room's wood paneling. My grandfather is alive and smiling, something startling and formerly glimpsed at only in old pictures. He asks me to make some coffee, and although I had never done so before, I am able to honor his request. And I am happy, and he is happy, and I

wake up just as happy.

I had never realized just how much I wanted to make my grandfather smile proudly. This overwhelming feeling was confusing considering I wasn't too close to the man for most of my life. What I had been missing was a basic understanding of him and the possibility of compassion. Revelations hidden in recurrent memories revealed what I couldn't have seen as a middle-school girl with middle-school fears and ideologies. My grandfather died a very slow and painful death-slow in order to allow his wife and son to cope with the loss and so painful that he once gave up eating to die but relented and ate when my family couldn't bear it. Considering that I have problems being cordial if only for the day being morning, the level of irritability and yelling my grandfather exhibited in the last years as a painfully dying man now appeared to be more reasonable in retrospect.

On June 5, having been haunted for months by visions of a man I was suddenly seeing for the first time, I drove wide-eyed-due to a visit to the eye doctor-to Memory Gardens so that I might reconcile with and reclaim my grandfather. A part of me honestly believed that I was capable of having a Forrest Gump/Jenny experience at the grave, with tears and connections and feelings of loss, or that perhaps my grandfather would walk from the trees to see me kneeling at his grave, and after I recovered from shock, he would ask me about all that I had accomplished while he had been gone, such that I could tell him about my newfound love of singing and my grades and my aspirations. But what I realized much too late as I found the marker with his name was that this day and this hour were no more special than any other day. The realism of his resting place did not reveal my grandfather to me, but rather how nothing about Memory Gardens fit my notions of the man, especially in death. First and foremost, his grave was located under the extended right hand of the statue of the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, a man of such personal dignity was buried in the middle of a plain row of dead, crisp grass, which was most definitely not the ornate, rolling green hill swept by the wind that I seemed to remember from the funeral.

I stood awkwardly shifting my eyes, waiting for the artificial anti-dilator drops from the optometrist to take effect, and I didn't know what to do now that I was at this overly bright place where so many things should be happening between my grandfather's ashes and me. Someone had placed plastic flowers in a vase of water on his marker, which seemed to me to be not charming, but another tie to the absurdity of his funeral and death, and the only thought to cross my mind was that I ought to clear the dead grass clippings from his marker. I tried to do it in a fashion reminiscent of the movies, with the half-caressing, half-archeological-dig swipes, but I felt foolish removing the few remnants of grass that actually occupied space anywhere near the grave. So I tried to study the dates on the grave marker, learning for the first time the date of his birth and of his death,

but that made me notice a space left aside for my grandmother when she will inevitably pass. On her side was a heart engraved with something too endearing and overly sentimental for my grandfather's taste. The heart read something like "together forever," which seemed to be more inane than the watered plastic flowers. Actually, I realized that I still felt that the nature of my grandfather's interactions with my grandmother made that heart seem more emotionally ironic than anything else. One day, they will be buried together for the rest of time, but the sentiment behind it was severely lacking.

Bewildered by the experience, or lack thereof, I stepped away from the barren site containing a golden cannonball and walked off to my car. I no longer stepped gingerly around the dead, only straight through. Pulling down the windshield visor against the sun, which echoed around my head like its own headache, I watched Mary's gaze and extended hand grow smaller in my rearview mirror.



I no longer stepped gingerly Around the dead, only steaight through



## Volunteer

#### Matt Green

She staggers in, hung-over from late night little league baseball, a slave to seven a.m. stoves. She mumbles to her dead mother who sits on a wooden mantle behind the kitchen table. The stainless steel refrigerator reflects the bodies of before and after from a television weight loss ad. Artificial cold touches her skin as she opens the hulking door. Barber's chocolate milk, Conecuh sausage, extra large eggs, mozzarella, cheddar, American, Parkay. She walks off and sits down, pressing her elbows against the cold marble bar. Dead mother speak ensues, "Look like this in two weeks, money back guaranteed." The darkness steals up her back. No light shines in. The sun rises on the other side of the house.

#### TRAINS OF OLD SILURIA

#### MALLORY FLYNN

Remember

how the cars rushed beside your five-year-old frame trailing concrete and smoke over water.

Recall the smirk and ribbons you wore, while she clasped you, sisterly, embracing, her mischievous smile peaking from behind your curly brown head.

Her additional two years seemed pleasantly unfair, while the black box captured you inside its depths.

Old Siluria hides your memories beneath its cracked cement. The oak trees whisper your secrets. Still beautiful, sixty years leaves you Changed. The mischievous smile evaporates now from your mind. As you recall, quivering eyelids press together, sending eyebrows south, scowling.

The train sang out next to the home you shared. Both your, her mother lay walls away. Confined, she could not see you advancing towards womanhood. Masculinity rained burnt dinners down on your meager table. Your, her father lived quietly incapable of emotion without her matronly presence, taken by age come too quickly.

You wear her clothes sometimes, loosely. She told you to take them, while she rested, wires attached, hair sparse, if...
You have suffered two years now
Unpleasantly. Remnants of childhood



blow by like paper before your eyes. Smiles sometimes vanish into black boxes beneath earth. Time forgets them, but you do not.

Defiant, you refuse the grasp of age. Your smile once held innocence in like a coffin but is wiser now.







She comes from the little girls' room and sits. Tentatively. Softly. Carefully on his hand, next to him. In their booth, contact.

His fear is palpable. His fear smells
like the pizza, sharp, warm and pointed.
His fear is jelly and he is toast. It is not spread thin
but heaped on, uneven and thick. His fear is a horse.
His love is a white hat.



Go ahead and eat he says, don't wait on me. She doesn't wait.









On the back of her tongue, words are boiling in an angry stew she will vomit on the table and scream. Why? Have you waited? For so long? And then she will slide closer and ask him in the Mother Tongue, in his ear where no one else can hear the slither of her accusations and rebuttals. Her hand on his head.

Thank you for dinner she says, I like this place.
She is welcome.

On the sidewalk, in front of his house their hands brush like worried horses in adjacent stalls, and their eyes fall into place. She sees a choir in red robes and the Pyramids! pointing to the sun. He sees Mt. Saint Helens falling down and eating the forest. He sees the entirety of the Napoleonic Wars fought on that city street. And, she sees God sitting in his underwear in the middle of a whorehouse, cigarrete in one hand the other wet and dripping.

They see skin, and water, and bones, and blood.

l do not want she says, to go home tonight. She is welcome.





# Legacy of a Dead Grandfather, R.E. Williams Daniel P. Strandlund

Funny he died like he did,
Heart beat out and dried up in his chest
Like an apple on hot pavement.
Figured his lungs-maybe liverWould have given out first,
Crusted and tarred over as they were.
It was his blood that killed him,
Williams' genes like I got.

Figure I'll die like he did,
Boxed up drunk and
Passed out in that graveyard.
That's the Williams way.
Hell, it's all the same
Down in the dirt, anyhow.



### In Praise of Famous Men Matthew Myrick

Restless in the bed of deceased fathers, I sat awake within the confines of an empty house with cedar walls, that stood resting beside a field already plowed and inviting winter to deal with the surviving stalks.

A guitar and drum leaned against a rocking chair across the room, feeding my romanticized notions of musicians and artists, encouraging me to take my place in Bob Dylan's choir, but no audience came to hear.

And each day my voice descended upon the dirt's deaf ears, a rotting barn, and a rooster with a song that announced the arrival of the sun and an old man, whose stories about a great war, battleships, and his children, somehow became my own.

And on that restless night,
my false memories flashed back
to years before my birth,
when I existed as breaths
in ancestral lungs,
passed down through generations
until a body took my name
and gave me a home,
beneath an aging quilt on an ancient bed,
falling asleep to the melodic howl
of a train's distant solo.

### Charmin and Porcelain Commodes

#### Aarti Madan

Spicy food and surprise bowel movements are an inextricable combination, running not so gracefully but hand in hand at all times. Our oak dining table hosts my mother's award-winning North Indian food nightly, so though our kitchen resembles a proper Indian-Southern setting complete with Lazy Susan, floral wall-paper, and Ganesh statue, my family's dinner-table talks inevitably lead to not so cotillion-like conversations about taking a shit. These talks are simultaneously provoked by father and hushed by my mother as my brother and I banter back and forth, always resuming the conversation with amusement at the predictable subject matter of our nightly dinners.

Despite our expected dinner-table conversation, our roots are the antithesis of predictable. One favorite bowel movement story comes from my grandmother, who with the onset of Alzheimer's tells this story a few times an hour. Mummiji had a burlap sack tied around her waist and then back up around her shoulder, and, resting in the slight nook created by the fashionably scratchy material lay my father. The two were crossing the newly created India/Pakistan border in August 1947, accompanied also by my grandfather and uncle. My dad was a whimpering two-month-old baby. Because we are Hindu and they had been living in the Pakistan side of the country, they had to leave behind all land, all money, and all assets and walk with the Hindu cows and soldiers to an essentially new country. My dad was suffering from a nasty bout of diarrhea, and Mummiji had to repeatedly take him out of the nook, stop at a stream to wash him and the burlap sack, and then start the process over again with an extra dry sack she had stored away. However, the soldiers gradually noticed her problem, and taking into consideration their horniness and her stunning looks, they offered her a ride in an army infantry truck hoping to cop a cheap feel on the bumpy road. Little were they aware of the feistiness that accompanies an angry and sleep-deprived mother dealing with a hot and wailing child. (It is at this point in the story that Mummiji gets most animated as she recollects her matriarchal days of immense power and finesse.)

So, she climbed into the back of the truck with my father and bid her husband and other child goodbye, eyes tearing but displaying a fierce look of determination. About halfway into the trip, a twenty-something private leaped up as the truck bounced over a pothole and, accidentally of course, landed with a handful of my grandmother's breast. She had expected such behavior and had thus stored away a soiled burlap sack to employ as her retaliation. The private sat unassumingly with a slight smirk creeping

across his face as he thought about his deft breast-grabbing techniques, when, all of a sudden, my grandmother "jumped" as the truck drove over another extra-large pothole, conveniently using the private's face to assist her landing. The hand that hit the private's face was carrying the soiled burlap sack, and he gagged as Mummiji emphatically apologized, claiming that she was about to put the sack under the seat when she lost her balance.

The other soldiers in the truck giggled hesitantly, laughing at the private's smelly situation, but not a one messed with my grandmother for the next five hours. So, as the story goes, not only did my father's loose bowels prevent my grandmother from walking the whole way, but they also assisted as ammunition.

The family stories are endless in relation to this foul subject matter, but in order to spare my audience, I shall venture into accounts that result because of bathroom related situations. Though I fear trivializing my parent's marriage, it is safe to say that they met

and consequently married because of my father's abilities to repair clogged toilets. Although toilets in India struggle still today, they undoubtedly were far worse in 1976. The porcelain model is not an upright standing toilet but rather a alorified hole in the ground encircled with porcelain foot grooves to prevent the slipping of feet. Clearly, the men who invented this model were just that-men. The situation is ideal for the urinating man who has the luxury of standing, but the model is tough on women, especially Indian women wearing traditional saris or salwar kameeses. Nonetheless, women had little choice.



... They met and consequently married because of my fathers Abilities to Repair clogged toilets.

One day as my father was strolling through downtown Karol Bagh, the urban shopping district where my mother's family lived and ran their jewelry business, he heard a woman screaming that her chunni, or her scarf, had somehow crept into the toilet before she flushed it and now the

toilet was overflowing. The houses in India are gated but otherwise fairly open dwellings, so my father, ever the eager toilet fixer, yelled out that he was familiar with clogged toilets and offered his help to the distressed lady. She came running out, looked him up and down, and after a quick glance of approval from her doubled-over cousin who was shaking with laughter, she concluded that my father was safe. As it was, the situation wasn't as much the young lady's fault as it was the previous user of the toilet, but my father's gallant success made him the hero for the day. The girls bade him good-bye with admiring eyes after giving him a glass of ice water, the only payment he would take, and

he shopped happily through the remainder of the day reflecting on his useful talent.

About two months later, my mother's family was in the process of helping her pick out possible husbands from the matrimonial section of the newspaper-"shopping," as my brother and I call it. Essentially, shopping is exactly what the word implies. These personal ads are more like advertisements in the used car section, following a set description for men and a set description for. women. 5'3", 110 lbs, fair, religious, vegetarian, Libra, Hindu, Bachelor's in ... is the standard format for women, with no mention of hobbies or interests. My father had his own matrimonial advertisement in the



He came to the Airport at the same time everyday and stole all the toilet paper From the men's restroom...

newspaper at the time due to his ripe age of twenty-seven, and my mother stumbled across it; she was intrigued that the ad mentioned an interest in repairing electronics and cars and such, and so she was immediately drawn to it.

A week later, after both sets of my grandparents had arranged a meeting time for tea and snacks, my mother walked behind her parents into my father's house. It is customary for the prospective girl to keep her head somewhat bowed, so she was in the house for more than a minute before my grandparents introduced the children. She raised her head slowly, her eyes demurely following, and she smiled shyly initially; upon recognizing my father, she jerked her head up and broke out into her roaring laugh, red-tinged

mouth wide open accentuating her straight white teeth. My future maternal and paternal grandparents stared at her in shock, for this behavior was by no means appropriate for a first introduction. They misunderstood her laughter, perceiving her to be laughing at my father. Within moments my father had explained the situation to everybody, indicating that my mother had been the attractive cousin of the clumsy girl in need that day in Karol Bagh. My grandparents chuckled hesitantly, believing there to be more to the story than their children were offering. The attraction between the youths was readily apparent, and my mother made repeated references to my father's ability to unclog toilets.

After a few more family meetings, the couple decided that they wanted to get married, and on August 21, 1976, they were engaged. To this day my mother candidly states that she chose my father above all the other prospective men because he could unclog a toilet. Unfortunately, because his talent is such a rarity, neighbors beckoned him on the hour, every hour to fix their toilets, resulting in his familiarity with the entire neighborhood's shit. This familiarity might have a tendency to quickly lose its charm, so when they were married on December 6, 1976, my parents decided to leave India three years later to relocate to the States because my father was tired of repairing clogged toilets.

After moving to the States in 1980, my parents experienced their first encounter with American toilets at the O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. Perhaps because our country was in a recession at the time, the airport either failed to pay the janitorial staff or there was a shortage of paper goods. Whatever the situation, none of the seven toilet stalls in the men's restroom near Baggage Claim had toilet paper, and, according to my parents, one could hear angry men yelling nearly to the parking deck. My father had to use the restroom as well, so he took it upon himself to find this so-called "toilet paper" that these men so desperately needed. You see, toilet paper was a relatively obscure luxury in the India of those days before so many individuals repatriated to the country after having lived in the United Kingdom or the United States. Instead of toilet paper, individuals wash with water; there is a faucet located on the ground next to each commode, accompanied by a small bucket about the size of a two-cup measuring cup. I suppose it might indeed be more hygienic to wash with water, but it is not pleasant after one is accustomed to toilet paper. Nonetheless, my father assumed that because the men were shouting so furiously, he needed to help find this mysterious new part that must have been unique to American toilets. Both of my parents had learned English and Hindi simultaneously in school because of the British rule over India. However, my mother's English was and is by far much better because she had taught the subject at the grade school level for a number of years. On the other hand, my father's accent is nearly incomprehensible to many people to this day, so on that first day in America, October 21, 1980, it was clearly much worse.

"Toilet taper...you tell me where there are toilet taper," he asked of any man in a navy blue suit, even those who were not airport personnel. Not one individual glanced his way, and my mother stood to the side, getting more and more embarrassed.

Finally, one of the airport workers hired to answer passenger questions actually stopped, took a moment to process what my father was attempting to articulate, and said, "Sir, what exactly is 'toilet taper'?"

My father looked at him somewhat bewildered and said, "You tell me misterevery crazy is screaming it in this country."

The man started to nod his head as he made sense of what my father was saying. "Toilet paper. That asshole took all the toilet paper from the damn bathroom again," he acknowledged as he started to walk towards the stock room. Apparently, the airport had recently fired a security guard who had failed to effectively guard the Baggage Claim and restroom area. To avenge his termination and prove that any guard was better than no guard, he came to the airport at the same time every day and stole all the toilet paper from the men's restroom in Baggage Claim. Although my parents found the situation humorous, they were unaware that this was not a representation of normal behavior in America, so they thought that toilet paper stealing was a common crime in the country. In addition, after accompanying the airport man to the restroom, my father was finally able to use a luxurious sit-down American toilet and give the American toilet paper a try. As he was standing at the shiny Formica sink washing his hands, a statuesque man with silver white hair and a demeanor of wealth and elegance walked up behind him.

They made eye contact in the mirror, at which point the man smiled and questioned, "Are you the young man who rescued us?"

A bit confused, my father replied, "What you mean, mister? I didn't rescue any, but I got you toilet paper. Is that what you talking about?" Without much more than a "Thank you," the man handed my father a wad of bills and glided out of the restroom. My parents hadn't even been in the country one hour, but three hundred dollars are significant even in the most remote tribal areas of Africa.

My parents decided that they needed to give something back to the country that had so graciously welcomed them. I was born a legal American citizen in 1982, unaware of the lack of such luxuries as toilet paper, and for that matter, food, on the other end of our planet. I was a greedy and gluttonous toddler, putting my hands on nearly any object to test it out as eating material. However, more often than not, after one nibble of the newspaper or cat food or a candle, I would conclude that the item had little taste and thus deserved to be in the toilet, my favorite method of disposal. Fortunately, as a hefty two-and-a-half year old, though I had plenty in the area of weight, I was lacking in the area of height and couldn't flush the toilet after I gave it its presents. My parents became accus-

tomed to finding strange objects in the toilet and though they reprimanded me repeatedly, they eventually had to resort to placing a small net next to the commode. They were tired of my behavior, but as I am told, they reinforced it by laughing at me as I would waddle away from the bathroom nonchalantly yet mischievously, breaking out into giggles as they would point at the foreign object in the toilet and say "No." Apparently, my fat face and fat curls were too irresistible to yell at, and my father conveniently was quite talented in this aspect of repair. However, my brother wasn't wooed by my good looks; he saw past the rambunctiously adorable child and saw the devilish little sister that would throw his He-Man figurines and Legos into the commode on a regular basis. One afternoon our babysitter Chris gave me my daily apple, but after the first bite, its gritty texture appalled me. With a sly glance to the left and to the right, I dashed to the bathroom on my covert mission to dispose of the apple. I pranced out on my merry way, success displayed on my face as I admired my work. After a duration of about thirty minutes, my brother walked into the den and beckoned me to the bathroom.

"What do you want-I didn't do anysing," I whined.

With his grandiose seven-year-old power, he grabbed my arm and swung me to the bathroom as if I were a rag-doll, saying, "You're not getting away with this. I'm making you eat it."

I cried belligerently, insisting on my innocence. "It wasn't me, I promise. I bet Chris did it." Doubting my innocent face, he held my wiggling body and forced my hand into the toilet. Despite the tears streaming down my face, he picked me up to the sink and helped me wash the apple. I ate the Granny Smith apple that had spent thirty minutes in the toilet, and I've never put anything in the commode since that did not belong there.

It is fitting that my family discusses toilets and toilet-related activities at the dinner table; the uncanny coincidence of a seemingly meaningless apparatus has affected all of our lives in a distinct fashion. It allowed for my parents' entry into the United States, and at that, an exciting entry. The various toilet-related incidents in my family have resulted in smiles and laughter at times when no punch line could erase sorrow. Only life's quirks would suffice. Accordingly, my father's prevailing concern as I am away at college is that I may run out of toilet paper. He buys it in bulk at Sam's Warehouse, always bidding me goodbye with a twenty-four pack of Charmin. Most will agree with my family--life is better with a good commode, regular bowel movements, and soft toilet paper.

# In Response to Your Inquiry

This will acknowledge your correspondence Of whenever. We do not appreciate your interest, And will take this opportunity to openly Flay your hopeful soul, Delighting in any tortures we inflict upon you.

The Collective firmly believes that
You are best kept unhappy,
Crushed, unstrung, or otherwise destroyed.
Understand that each of our individual members
Is entirely resolute in this matter.
Moreover, we wish to express our sincere hope
In your reactionary and self-inflicted death.

Further, we feel a duty to warn you
That any calls, letters, chocolates,
Flowers, drinks, come-ons, or advances
Of any sort postdating this notice
Will be met with hostile rejection,
And open mockery of you,
the pathetic, virgin claimant.

Not a chance, The Benign Angelic Princesses



#### **Tide** William Ashley

Bilingual signs direct the traffic of old Toyotas with rusted fender flames into the weather-pocked parking lot of a coin laundry.

A family of sock mill workers exit the small car, baskets piled high with paint splotched Dungarees and sweaty white t-shirts.

The men take a seat to watch a dubbed version of Scooby-Doo as a young mother, begins to unfurl her load.

I begin my own laundry not knowing how to fit into this Sunday tradition as familiar to them as church and NFL football. The young mother shoots a look at me, as if she felt some fascination in the polo player on my dirty shirt. I sit and pretend to read, occasionally stealing glances at this young woman, a small queen with calluses on her hands.

If only I asked her to dinner at the club, maybe she'd be impressed, or at least be removed from the drudge of cooking the same beans and avocado.

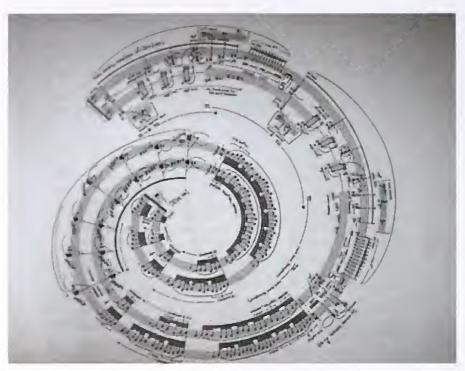




I imagine folding a linen napkin starched crisp with care into her delicate lap. I see the looks, her to me, and others to us. The same stares, that she is too familiar with, directed at me. Maybe this date is Too dangerous.

I sit unmoving, watching, taking everything about this woman, only occasionally interrupted by howls of laughter when Scooby shakes in startled amazement. My fantasy isn't distracted. She hasn't read the same paragraph five times in as many minutes. Nothing strikes her as odd. But, the zookeepers who hold and control This unsuspecting creature do not notice the pains she makes for them. I would give her conversation with her laundry, if only she would let me.

I fold my laundry in neat hospital corners, in anticipation for the same routine of red shirt Monday, blue shirt Tuesday, letting that fascination fall into the anthology of others. A quick walk to the car and I am glad that the paint is rusting off the fender of my car. What was Scooby saying?



Arrangement by John Cage

## Piano Carcasses Kelsey Grissom

Crowded without care, jammed at senseless angles,
They creak and sag and sigh into the dirty floor,
Their great wooden bodies curling into decay.
Piano tomb.

They lie there as they were left Defeated and used up.



Ivory teeth crumbling and broken off Strings severed and limp, Dying music-makers.

They rest without rest, sinking into the floor,
Their own weight crushed into themselves,
Their stained wood panels kicked in as breath escapes them.
Work-horse pianos, abandoned in the grimly lit room.

Yet sometimes-

When the breeze blows under the door
They quit their pain-filled silence and groan with remembering.
Splitting, quiet shrieks gush through their hoarse copper strings
The wind scrapes lightly on metal- echoes what they cannot sound.
Piano ghosts

Crying music from dulling brass frames.

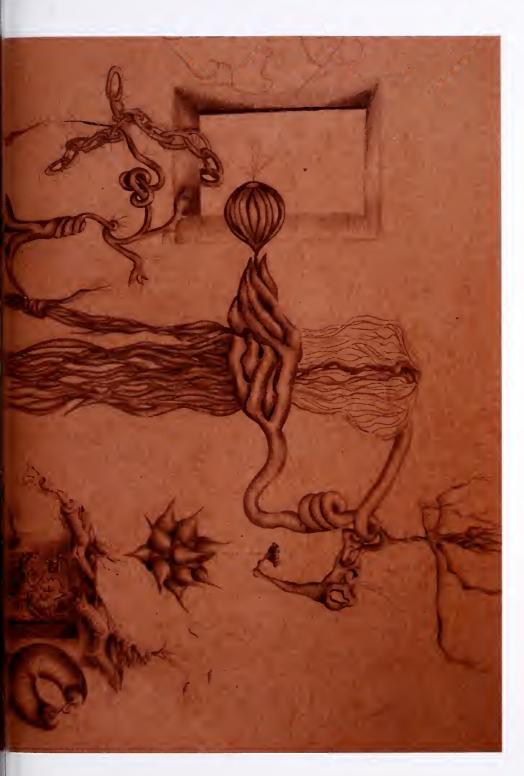
They wait for the melodies to leave them.



#### Granddaddy Anna Belle Wilder

He lived with my grandmother for twenty-five years Before she finally had enough. Mother said he played the guitar and sang country songs His band kept him in nightclubs and out of their house Four or five nights a week. When Grandmother went, other men asked her to dance, There'd be fights, cuttings, police, So she'd stay behind, Lying awake in the hot air until he'd slouch in Stinking of Jack Daniels and sweat and a thousand cigarettes. When Mother had earaches, he'd light one up, Lay a tissue over her ear, and blow in the warm smoke As she lay listening to him brag About making money, bidding on farm land in Beatrice. He overslept mornings, lazily urged the old car to school, While in the backseat between her brother and sister, Mother chewed her fingernails down to the quick, Her nine o'clock tardys adding up like a grocery list. Saturdays, Grandmother followed him down crooked dirt roads Later showing Mother pictures of him With the coach's wife or their neighbor Jeanette, "To my darling" scratched on a photograph in a drawer. Once, Mother spent Christmas worrying over a poor grade, At the very last minute she gave him the test. He hardly looked at it. He used to slip me twenties as we left his old house And he played the guitar for me, singing tunes About corn fields and cows and "back home." Mother's face hardened behind her makeup, her jaw set in a line. But his guitar's in the closet now, and most afternoons, Mother sits beside him in that firm chair, Listening to his warbling complaints, His words wafting through her mind like smoke through a tissue.







## Highlands

Rish Spurlock

The hill's warm licking flames of red, amber to auburn orange, sun shimmering gold, and lingering, faded green, appears as if a preschooler had dabbled his paint smeared fingers across the scenery.

Smoke and mist rise up from valleys and mountains, like lumpy backs of



sheep, marching off into a hazy distance.
The road moves up and down,
deeper into trees, higher into
rocks that seep out water from somewhere inside.
I've been this way before.

Worn little shops, shingled and mossy, beg gifts of clover honey and pear jam, Edison light bulbs and old phonographs have been waiting all these years, still perfect as the day they were made. Outside, wild azaleas and rhododendron lead down steep slopes to cool, clear creeks and tiny pinecones dangle over cliffs.

Meals of crisp brown chicken,
purple hulls that we had husked that morning,
and blonde cornbread glistening from melted butter
answers the desires of everyone's belly.
Penny blackjack and milked down coffee
with grandparents and Aunt Sophia after dinner.
On the deck, Mom and Dad hold hands,
indulging themselves in stars never seen.
Gentle wind whispers the house to sleep.
Soft, dozy dogs lie wrapped at my feet,
grunting and chasing black bears
in their dreams.



On Friday, Mama told us the Lord took Daddy in his sleep. The funeral is this afternoon, and my nine-year-old brother Larry is sitting at the breakfast table looking at the funny papers in the Sunday Wynne Register like a rich person would study that Mona Lisa painting in France. My name is Earl and I am fifteen and our sister Marty is eighteen and lives with her husband and my two-year-old niece, two houses down. I asked Marty once why didn't she just move in next door, the house was empty, and she said that she needed at least one house between her and Mama and Daddy, although since Daddy died on Friday I suppose I will ask her again when I see her at the funeral. I wonder if her husband Billy will come drunk or if he will come at all. He told me after he knocked up Marty that if he had a son, he was going to name him Miller High Life Mustang Sanders, on account of the Mustang being the first (and only) car he ever owned, and the Miller High Life being the reason he didn't own it anymore, and he said the Sanders was because it was his last name, but I think it may've had something to do with the Colonel's fried chicken since Billy is so fat and greasy. Mama said she sure was glad when Marty had a girl, because no grandbaby of hers was going to be named Miller High Life Mustang. Mama's grandbaby was named Marty Two Sanders, after my sister, who is better than beer but still not quite right. Mama calls the baby MT, and Daddy is dead so it doesn't matter anymore what he called her.

I can hear Mama's car pulling into the carport that took Daddy until last month to get around to finishing. Mama has been at the church where the ladies have all gotten together and set up an emotional crisis support center for our family, but only Mama will go. She yelled at Marty on the phone yesterday and told her that she needed to go, that it would be good for her and besides, Miss Bloom (who was Marty's third-grade Sunday School teacher) has been asking about her, and Miss Bloom was on her last legs herself. Even though Marty was only on the phone, I could hear her from clear across the kitchen tell Mama that the place the ladies had set up looked like a bunker and that Daddy hated those ladies anyway. Mama told Marty not to talk about Daddy like that and Marty told Mama that she was going to have to deal with the fact that Daddy did not believe in God and was not in Heaven and that wherever he was, for all Marty cared, Mama could end up there too.

But now, Mama comes in the door in her big black dress and I can tell that she

has not been crying because she's wearing enough mascara to plaster the face of every whore in Arkansas, and it obviously hasn't been running down her cheeks. She walks over, puts her hands on Larry's shoulders, and tells me, "Earl, make sure you and Larry are ready for the funeral by eleven, since the ladies are all bringing food to the Family Crisis Control Center." She grabs her back and bends over and gives Larry a lipstick kiss on the cheek and I think that if the ladies at the church are dressed anything like Mama, I am going to be bathing in lipstick by the time we get Daddy in the ground. Mama stands up, lights a cigarette, and reaches with both hands into the cabinet above her head to get a saucer before she remembers that she is wearing lots of hairspray and holding a lit cigarette above her head. Say what you want about Mama, but she's never made the same mistake twice. She puts the cigarette in her mouth and gets the saucer.

Marty busts through the door with MT as if she's already in the middle of a conversation with Mama and hands me MT's diaper bag. "Billy will not be attending the service today," she says. Mama does not say anything; she just cuts a piece of coffeecake and puts it on her saucer, and she trims it so that each corner of the piece of cake touches the rim of the saucer. She calls MT over and gives her the scraps. The baby tries to say her name, but Mama thinks she might be retarded because she can't pronounce "MT" right. Instead, she says, "Empty." Marty says, "Do not feed her cake, Mama. You know she's got a w-e-i-g-h-t problem" and Mama says "If you want your Daddy and I to keep her anymore, you're going to have to get used to the fact that I am going to spoil that child." The room gets quiet since Mama has done it again-she's talked about Daddy in the present tense, like he's still there. Marty opens her mouth to say something but just burps and says, "Excuse me." Larry looks up from his paper and laughs.

Mama did the present tense thing yesterday, too. She went to Mr. Hick's Quick Mart since Mr. Hicks' wife, Belinda, was one of the lipstick ladies at the church and Mama could get a whole lot of free groceries. And besides, she said, if he charged her, she knew that sweet Belinda would lay it on him real thick until he gave Mama her money back. But anyway Mama bought a pack of Carltons for herself and a pack of Turkish Golds for Daddy and when she got home, she put them on the table where Daddy always sat. He would always tell me never to start smoking, that he was my age when he started, and that he wanted me to live a long time. I promised him, even though I really like the smell of Daddy's cigarettes.

Now MT wipes the cake from her face with her fat little fingers and says "Empty" again before waddling over to Daddy's cigarettes which are still there on account of the

fact that every time I think to put them away, I get the heebie-jeebies and decide that I will leave them there, for just a little while longer, in case Daddy wakes up and comes home.

We finish breakfast and I get dressed and go make sure Larry is doing all right because I don't think he understands everything and he needs somebody to tie his tie. I walk in our room and he's sitting in the middle of the floor, naked as a jay bird, reading his dinosaur book. "Larry, come on now," I tell him. "It's ten-thirty and we've got to leave here by eleven." He stands up but never looks up from his book and walks into his closet and picks out the set of clothes that Mama has set out for him. There is a checkered tie laying over the hangar on his sports coat, and I guess the tie is Daddy's because it drags on the ground when Larry walks, and he almost trips over it since he is still looking at his book. He walks over to his dresser and fights one-handed with a pair of whitie-tighties until he finally puts the book down and pulls up his undershorts. I put Daddy's tie around my neck and tie it loosely so that Larry can just slip it around his neck and pull the knot. The tie smells more like Mama's cigarettes than Daddy's, so I know that she held it for a long time before she put it in Larry's closet.

Mama wants Marty and MT to come with us so we all pile into Mama's Buick and head to the church. We pull up and park in front by the curb, where you're not supposed to park. Mama says that everybody that would tow the car will be at the funeral since Daddy's funeral is the social event of the year, we don't have to worry about it. We walk inside and into the foyer of the church. Larry finally looks up from his book, which he's brought with him, and he looks away and closes his eyes. He's scared, and I secretly hope for his sake that they have Daddy's coffin closed. I want to see him again, since I haven't seen him since the night before Mama says the good Lord took him away. Maybe they will let me see him and keep it closed for the service for the sake of Larry and Mama, who I heard say on the phone last night after I went to bed that she never wants to see him again.

We walk in the sanctuary, and its empty except for the coffin, which is closed, and flowers from just about everybody in Greensboro, but they're all carnations and I hate carnations since they are all cheap. We walk up to the coffin and stand around it and the preacher says a prayer before he lets the town in for the funeral. He says, "We know that he is in a better place, Lord," and I look at Marty because we both know that Daddy is not in a better place because he did not believe in God, but Marty has her eyes closed and I guess she is secretly praying that Daddy really did believe in God so he is in

Heaven with Gramma and Grandpa. We sit on the front pew and the preacher gives Mama a box of Kleenex, which I don't think she is going to need, and he opens the back doors so that the town can come in.

I look back as everybody comes in and I see all my classmates from school, but they are all looking at the floor, trying not to look straight at me which is fine because I don't think they like me much and they are just there because their parents probably said it was the right thing to do. After about twenty minutes of lipstick kisses from the ladies and handshakes from their husbands, the preacher stands up like he is going to start the service. For once, the whole town is in the church, including Daddy, though I guess he had to die for someone to drag him there without him kicking and screaming. The

preacher starts with the service, and some of the lipstick ladies get up to sing, and it's a nice song so Mama is smiling appreciatively at them; I think she wants them to think that she liked it so they will bring her casseroles after the service since she hates to cook. Daddy always did get mad when Mama wouldn't cook, and last week before he died he got so mad that he threatened to up and leave her and move to California. He didn't know I was around the corner or he wouldn't have said it; he always made sure none of us kids were around before he said something to Mama about leaving.



The preacher begins, "Lord, we remember a dreamer."

or not believing in God. The only way we ever heard was from Marty or I spying on them, and ever since Marty moved out, I had to do it myself. Daddy did always love California, though. He showed me in a magazine once the huge "HOLLYWOOD" letters. Daddy told me that one day he was going to get his picture taken while he stood in the middle of the first "O."

The preacher gets back up to give the eulogy, which he really isn't qualified to give since Daddy never came to church and the only times the preacher talked to him

was when Mama insisted having him over for dinner. Those were some of the only times she ever cooked. Daddy never talked much when the preacher was over because he was only sitting there to appease Mama.

The preacher begins, "Lord, we remember a dreamer."

All of a sudden, the back double-doors to the church fly open and in barrels Billy, carrying a half-case of Miller High Life and staggering towards the coffin as if he were avoiding a floorful of mousetraps. Mama is fine until Billy gets to Daddy and sets his beer down on the coffin and then she faints. "None," Billy yells to the crowd, "of you people understood this man." He pauses to take another gulp, and the preacher leaps from his pulpit, trying to Indiana-Jones his way to Billy before he does any more damage. The preacher tries to tackle him, but Billy is so big that he punches the much punier Reverend in the face and the preacher literally cowers in the corner of the sanctuary. Nobody moves, especially Mama who at this point is fainted on top of Marty, who is paralyzed because of Mama laying on her and because she's scared to death of Billy when he's been drinking.

"This man," Billy says to his captive audience, "did not believe in God!" Another gulp. "He hated you people!" Mama wakes up, slowly, and looks to make sure she has not been dreaming. She falls over again, although this time pretty dramatically, so I'm not so positive it's for real. I turn around backwards to see if my classmates are still there, and I see all the dads slack-jawed and wide-eyed and the moms trying as hard as they can to cover the ears of their kids. I cover Larry's ears since Mama is busy with herself. Daddy would have held my hears if he were here but I'm the man of the house now so I have to just listen to it all.

MT pops up and since Mama is passed out and Marty is scared to death and I am just trying to cover Larry's ears, nobody is there to stop her. She waddles over to Billy and he picks her up and swings her by her feet, like he's playing with her. Her head almost hits the corner of the coffin, and I can hear an audible gasp from all the moms behind us. MT tries to say her name while upside down, "Empty."

"No, darlin'," Billy says, "Your Gramps is in that box!"

"Empty!" she says again, with a little more enthusiasm, since she is right side up again.

"Look, Marty Two! He's in there!"

With that, Billy picks up his beer and sets it and his daughter on the ground and reaches for the rim of the coffin. If Mama was just playing dead before, she's definitely passed out now; she's fallen into Marty's lap, who has passed out on me. Billy pulls on the rim with a lot of force, since coffins aren't made to be reopened. All of a sudden, the top

opens and the carnations which are laying on top of the coffin fly everywhere; all over the floor, on MT, on Billy, and one lands in Mama's lap, though she doesn't notice because she is busy being fainted.

Billy howls. "Well hot damn! You were right, Marty Two! Not a damn thing in there!"

At this point, the preacher has worked up the nerve to walk back over to Billy, and he tries to shut the casket, but the lid is stuck. "Shame on you!" the preacher screams. "You've ruined this poor family!" This time, *Billy* is scared to death, and so he picks up his beer and daughter and leaves the church.

Marty wakes up from being passed out and looks around to see if she is dreaming, and she sees the coffin, empty as Daddy's closet was the day after he left us. I look at her, and she looks at me, and this time we know. Daddy's not in Heaven; Daddy's on his way to Hollywood, and he's not coming back.

#### Q: Why?

Taylor Moore

Q: Who?

The Bossman, that's who.

And you listen good you,
you little sonofabitch. When
that bell rings you'll
carry those boxes.

Dials and needles crack and
jumble in cardboard boxes, so we gotta be
safe with the gloves
from the boxes by the doorsays the Bossman
whose hands smell like rubber

says the Bossman whose hands smell like rubber and swimming pool cleaner, whose boxes float like brown ghosts down hallways towards green EXIT signs.

#### Q:What?

A birthday party!
For everyone in town!
With ice cream and cakes and booze.
For the grown-ups, of course,
who stand in the kitchen,
gargling malice and movie reviews.
A birthday party!
With a funny magician!
Who'll make everyone disappear
but you





photostill of Harold Llyod

#### Q: When?

Some morning, some morning some appleskin morning when everything is the blue under young lover's eyelids, when the world is the blue at the bottom of pools, when the night terror sweat dries from corners and rooftops the morning blue drips to cool under beercans and tires that yawn to drink in the morning.

#### Q: Where?

On lakes, at night, when the kids sneek down, when the dust on the water flies up to faces and hands who, through push and pull of swimming, know skin.
On lakes, at night, when, discovered on a dock, the trials of summer slip off and dive together to the bottom, in dark, and feed on hints dropped like hot rocks in the water to cool.

# Move back three spaces Meredith Hanson

Andrew's world is that
of a nine year old
line backer swirling
behind unsuspecting
fourth graders in a crucial
game of tag in any burning April
day on the play ground.

He still has accidents sometimes but firmly believes the informative commercials most children mature around ten and so of course, his 10th birthday will be the most ultimate big-boy pants bon fire.

He reluctantly pushes
his finger-print collaged
lenses back up the steep
slide that is his nose,
they come to rest slightly unevenly
on his face and he is unsure
whether or not it is his frames
or his ears that are crooked as the tears
pour down his gentle round
cheeks to drop off the edges of his
chin, as he sobs uncontrollably.

He understands his moral character in green, yellow, and redthe colors of the bland paper circles that hang crisply beside the chalk board, one clothes pins for each student, one lunge farther away from green light with each careless mistake, one move away from the afternoon plunge into Mrs. Smith's treasure chest.

He knows
the clothes pin with his
sharpied signature on it never
leaves the green light and
he always carries home
treasures and never knows
the feelings of guilt
or disappointment
because he
always is nothing but
the good kid.

But today he realizes
no one can stay and play
in green forever, because
even he may leave the crisp
worksheet on the kitchen
table and cry sobs of shame
and misunderstanding,
wretching out his wrath all because
he couldn't retrieve a plastic
parachuter piece, all because
this was the first day his
pin had ever been on
yellow.









### Coffee at Dawn

A man embraces wheat with his scythe. Its blade reflects the milky stillness of a harvest moon, The handle smoothed from years of rough-handed use. A nightly silence, broken only by the rubbing Of the wind on the stalks and the muted swishing Of strokes slicing through hollow, golden stems. He watches the multitudes fall onto each other With the same reticent contentment of a holy man Whose church is abundant on a holy day. He pauses and looks eastward across a dirt road And senses the hand of life in the wind. He is the birds in the thicket along the field edges That share the bounty. He is the poisonous wheat spiders That share the soil, though there have been none this season. He is the solitary call of a barn owl Searching for mice. He is his children and their children, And he is the wife that will greet him With coffee at dawn.



# AFTER ELIOT'S "PRELUDES" ELIZABETH FRYE

I.

Summer curls tiny hairs on your neck downward With a mix of sweat and chlorine
Sometime after three.
Days that drag out just to see the fireflies.
The taunting stains of red clay about the soles of your feet
And newspapers slam on the sidewalk
Car radiators hum
As if they carry on some secret talk,
And inside the tree's fragile plums
A blind worm finds his way through the maze
And then the lifting of a hot day's haze.

11.

The evening winds its way to sleep
Of sweet taste of mojitos
From the heat-cracked street
With all the aching tires that creep
To tired suburban homes
With the other comforts
That evening brings
I think of all the fingers
That are tapping malformed rhythms
On a thousand sun-burned backs.

|||.

You toss a shoe from the closet, You lie upon your stomach, and mumble: You breath, and watch the clock revealing
The thousand worthless tasks
On which your day is waiting;
You focus on banana-peeling.
And when all of night abandons you
And light falls fluorescent on the wall
And you hear the footsteps in the hall
You give one thought to yesterday
But yesterday never thinks of you;

where
You pull feathers from my hair,
And touch the wrinkled top of my nose
With one short flick of your index finger.

Standing propped against the doorway,

IV.

My limbs move into the grooves
Left by two sleepers in the center of the bed,
Held by twisted sheets
At nine and ten and eleven o'clock:
And long bony fingers open car doors
And morning coffee, and voices
Filled with pleasant pleasantries,
The emptiness of a trafficked street
Restored to return to home
I am filled by nothings that are

wrapped Around these evermores, and stay: The force of some profoundly unrequested

Profoundly desperate thing.

Drag your fingers across the strings, and play;

These days arrive like unmarked letters Begging to be opened quickly.



### Execrpt from "The Insomniae" P. Alexander Scokel

Elaine hated the monthly trip to the grocery store. She loathed the feelings of guilt that wracked her as she covertly slipped the large jars of viscous, vermilion liquid between the frozen pizzas that she couldn't eat and the toilet tissue that she didn't need. She detested spending the extra money in a vain attempt to go unnoticed by the other shoppers, a vain attempt to retain the anonymity of the occasion. She hated the embarrassment as the clerk, a pimply, overweight slob with tobacco on his breath and hair so greasy it would never lay flat again, ran the blood over the scanner. He always glanced at the jars, taking them in and registering their significance, does it really take that long for you to get it, you sub-human oaf? You know what I am! before allowing his eyes to focus on the foodstuffs and the toiletries for a digestive system she obviously didn't possess. The tiny smile began there, cranking either extreme of his lips slowly towards his beady eyes. He would play it off as if he was just wishing her a good day, but she knew the truth. He was laughing at her. He would tell his friends about her. They would all have a good giggle, a good laugh about it. Like they did every month, over two stupid jars. Just two fucking jars.

It was only two jars. That was the magic number. Unless they were out of the big jars and she had to buy the smaller, mayonnaise-sized jars. Then she'd need 6. It had taken her some trial and error to find exactly how much she would need to subsist for a single month. They were two jars, two jars that opened her to ridicule, agony, fear, hatred, despair, and the deepest, darkest loneliness of the soul.

And frankly, sometimes she understood.

All it took was a casual glance down the aisle where the jars were kept, varying shades of red ranging from an almost clear strawberry pink on the near end to the practically black Extra-Viscous on the far end. That's the kind of stuff that would make her a freak, she knew. As long as she never needed the Extra-Viscous, she would never hit the rock bottom. She could maintain her self-respect, as long as she never drank the Extra-Viscous. Who drinks Extra-Viscous, anyway? Who needs that? Not that she would delude herself into drinking the 'Lite,' the pink, watered-down garbage that sold for the same price as the thick stuff, either; she knew what she needed, and she wasn't going to pretend to be something she wasn't. But isn't that what the frozen pizza and the toilet paper are all about?

Enough.

There were good things about the grocery store, though. There was the feeling

of being normal; of walking down isles, pushing a buggy, searching out packed-for-mass-consumption foodstuffs like the rest of the world. Extra-Viscous? Goddamnit. She listened to the packed-for-mass-consumption music that dripped into the building from above, and if she strained her ears, she could make out the strains of a song, usually popular in the eighties, re-rendered into a more easily-swallowable unobtrusive format. She heard somewhere that the music was chosen by advertisement savvy psychologists as music that would make one hungry. More likely to buy junk food and snacks. More likely to take advantage of the impulse buys near the register. Frankly, Billy Joel never did that for Elaine.

For all the feeling of normalcy Elaine could glean from the monthly grocery excursion, she knew that she never pulled it off exactly right, and that made her feel self-conscious. She was too quick about it. About shopping. It was straight to the toilet tissue, then a b-line to the pizzas, then an only slightly meandering path to the jars. Sometimes, when someone else was on the jar aisle, she would slowly wander along the adjacent aisle, hoping that the aisle would be devoid of life before she made the turn about the snack cakes, and quickly, with an efficiency bred of shame, liberated two heavy jars from the midpoint of the aisle. Extra-Viscous, really. But even these sidetracking jaunts down the snack-food aisle bore the mark of humiliated expedience. She went to the store, after all, for one reason and one reason alone. Two reasons, really. Two jars.

It seemed to Elaine that everyone else in the store charted their own unhurried paths through the store. While Elaine's haste seemed to her a natural extension of her busy (she preferred 'active') lifestyle, the other consumers seemed to shed their winged feet at the door. They hobbled slowly along as if they had only their ankles, broad but not long enough, to support them, stopping regularly to rest, all the while disguising their discomfort by making a show of reading labels, examining prices, digging for coupons. Goddamn you! You don't care how much fat is in that. Look at yourself.

Elaine was afraid that she was becoming embittered.

But if normalcy was to be believably achieved, Elaine realized that she would have to take a longer, slower path through the store. Perhaps she would map it out one month. She could pre-plan it, perhaps? Time it, so that she took no longer than three quarters of an hour, but at least half. That would do it if anything, she was sure of it. She would be like the child in the comic, the round one that was never funny, and follow an invisible dashed line through the store. Perhaps hopping over the lobster vat and saying hi to the bakery ladies. Perhaps not. But she would finish her trip with an eight pack of Charmin, three Red Barons, and two jars of thick, red food. Predictable, perhaps, but she didn't think it would hang up her plan.

I have issues.

The statue lady was in the store again this month, Elaine realized as she circumvented the valentine snack cakes and turned her metal food-cage to roll it down the aisle. This time she was there, in the aisle that Elaine never dared face unless it was utterly devoid of life; she was there, dressed in her black, sleeveless dress, *Pleather?* and limp-brimmed black hat, staring at Elaine with the precise and carefully observed *faithfully recorded?* knowledge of what stood solidly between the pizza, the metal of the buggy, and the tissue. Elaine met her eyes for only a moment, long enough to produce a mirage of a smile and a mumbled greeting before her chin dipped, her gaze dripping to the linoleum tile floor.

Barrow liked the statue lady. Something about her, the way she affected an eternal presence, utterly timeless while sensibly contemporary, faultless in her silent, stone-like vigilance month upon month, affected her roommate in a manner most women were utterly incapable of. She was motionless, barely breathing, never blinking, perhaps performing but with no visible place to tip. Elaine had considered offering her a dollar or two once, but to interrupt the aesthetically perfect stillness which the statue lady exacted would be akin to heresy. So she would move for what? A bill? Sliding the money into a pocket on her person was equally absurd. One does



.. She was there, in the aisle that Elaine Never dared face unless it was utterly devoid of life.

not touch Michelangelo's David. One looks, blushes if she is immature, but never touches. Certainly the statue lady carried no groceries. Elaine saw her almost every month, and never once had the statue lady been dressed differently, or held in her possession a mere morsel of food. But it was that intense indifference with which the statue lady observed her world, Elaine theorized, that Barrow found so damn aesthetically pleasing.

He would have found her radiant tonight, Elaine realized, making a mental note to tell him about the way her skin adopted a reddish hue from the lights in the freezer units. The photons, filtered through the jars *Extra-Viscous* to flit across her porcelain ivory china skin. She would have to tell Barrow about it, he would be so jealous. *But she's blocking the jars!* Elaine paused, gave a slight shudder, considered taking the snack-food aisle,

She won't move! mastered the impulse towards flight, and slowly pushed down the aisle towards her jars, towards the statue lady. She became acutely aware of the tiny squeal the forward left wheel gave as it shuddered along; Elaine struggled against the cart, pushing desperately against it. She stopped at her jars, and stared in utter fright. There were no big jars... just the small ones.

The statue lady stood only a meter away, pulsing with life while immobile as a corpse. Elaine knew that the statue lady was staring at her. The statue lady had eyes that followed you around a room. No matter where Elaine stood, she would be able to glance directly into the depthless black orbs ringed with green-gray-blue that situated themselves on either side of the statue lady's eyes. Sometimes she thought that it was the color that really scared her. The statue lady's eyes were unique, and they served to remind Elaine that she was utterly, entirely, inhumanly and completely different. They were the color of the sky just before dawn, when one knew that the sun would soon peek over the mountain, in those frightening moments when Elaine was not sure that she would make it home in time. Elaine picked up one of the jars, moved it towards the cart, and made the irreconcilable mistake of glancing into the pre-dawn orbs. The jar crashed to the linoleum, splattering in slow motion across the floor, drips cascading across the statue lady's feet, glass spinning down the aisle.

The statue lady didn't move. She posed, exactly as before, but her demeanor had transformed from one of intense vigilance to unconcerned condemnation. Elaine tried to smile, but found herself unequal to the task.

Elaine quickly grabbed six jars, resigning herself to the knowledge that the statue lady *knew*. She dropped the jars into the cart and was celeritously maneuvering towards the checkout before she began arranging her camouflage: pizzas on top and on the right, tissues on the left.

Elaine paused before sliding the cart down the ramp onto the asphalt lot. If they were going to try to get her, they would do so here. She took an entirely unnecessary deep breath and trekked to her four-door sedan. She thought about the clerk who couldn't even restrain a giggle this time. She put the jars in the trunk. She thought about the statue lady who knew. She put the pizzas and the tissues in the trunk. She thought about the announcement: clean up on aisle fourteen. Her key found the ignition, and she left the parking lot, unceremoniously cutting off a blue pick-up truck as she pulled onto the highway.

On her way home, she dropped the pizzas and tissues off at the old gymnasium that the city had converted into a homeless shelter, and wondered, not for the first time, where the liquid in the jars came from.

Barrow was watching Law and Order when Elaine got back.

"I hate this show," she stated *He knows.* as she carried the brown paper bag of rattling jars through the living room. She opened the refrigerator, slowly and carefully unloading the jars, cradling each one like a newborn. *But he has a crush on Sam Waterston.* 

"This show is great," Barrow mouned from the living room as Elaine folded the paper bag and slipped it into the recycling bin. "It has Sam Waterston."

"But the dialogue is atrocious," she replied, sitting down on the worn, yellowing couch with him. She looked at the TV, her eyesight failing to resolve the tiny spots of yellow, blue, and red into anything cohesive.

"But it's Sam Waterston," Barrow defended. "It's like it doesn't really matter what he's saying, I'd be happy to listen. He could be selling butt-cream and I'd be happy to listen."

"Oh? So this is the butt-cream episode?" Elaine asked. Barrow smiled, his grotesque lips pulling even tighter over his pearl teeth than before.

"Were they out of the big jars?" Barrow asked. There wasn't even a commercial on, Elaine realized. This is how she knew he cared; he didn't even wait for the commercial. Elaine sighed, felt the familiar burning in the base of her eyes, and lay her head on Barrow's thin leg. She sniffed.

"Yeah..." she whispered.

"Was it that bad?" Barrow drawled, producing the most concerned drawl he could muster. He ran his fingers through her hair, slowly scratching and massaging her scalp.

"I dropped one of the jars," she whispered. Barrow muted the television. "They announced it over the store speaker. Clean up on aisle whatever. Everyone knew it was me, too. Look at my pants." She felt Barrow shift slightly, his muscles tightening, leaning to his left to see the dried blood on her pants legs. "They made me pay double for it."

"What? Why?"

"Because they're racist assholes," she groaned. "They claimed it was one of the big jars, even though it obviously wasn't. They didn't even have any big jars."

"Anyone bother you on the way out?" he asked. Elaine shook her head; she felt his sandpaper hand slide down the length of her neck to her back where he traced long ovular patterns into her shirt with his fingertips. "Good."

They watched Law and Order until the next commercial break.

"The statue lady was there," Elaine reported, her ear still pressed firmly against Barrow's thigh. She felt the muscles contract slightly at the mention of the threatening monolith of feminine vigilance that stood stone-like in the grocery store every night. Every

night either of them had been there, at least. "She was wearing the same thing, of course. And she saw me drop the jar."

"I'm sorry," Barrow said, and Elaine suddenly felt intense pity for him. She knew he was struggling, looking for the right thing to say, to comfort her. Social interaction was Barrow's weak point, and she was forcing him to support her. But she needed it, and she admitted, deep inside, that she even derived slight enjoyment from a guy who extended himself to make her happy. She understood that each word was difficult for Barrow, but she couldn't deny herself the satisfaction of his reassurance. All she would have to say is



the quilt lessens the wore you do it. Elaine's head, gently placed her on it, and lumbered into the kitchen Elaine.

'No, it's okay' or 'Don't worry about it' or something similar.

Law and Order returned, and Barrow was granted temporary reprieve.

"You would have drooled," she said, preempting any comfort he might offer when the commercials began anew. "You know how the fridge lights make the jars kinda glow? Well the red glow shone on her. Even I was impressed."

Barrow nodded.

"I would have enjoyed it," he said. He gently lifted her head, stood (with no small effort), slipped a pillow under Elaine's head, gently placed her on it, and lumbered into the kitchen. Elaine allowed herself a smile. This is it, this is

perfect. He was so immensely sweet, and Elaine wished, not for the first time, that he were heterosexual. Barrow shambled in and placed a large ceramic mug on the coffee table in front of her. It smelled warm, at least ninety-eight degrees. She smiled her thanks, and Barrow returned to the kitchen. She sipped the red liquid, allowing herself a little pleasure as the thick substance slipped down her throat. Like any vice, the guilt lessens the more you do it. Elaine could hear the sounds of sizzling meat and a spoon on a frying pan wafting in from the kitchen. "How are things on the Zane front?" Barrow asked, shouting over the sound of sizzling flesh.

Elaine shuddered.

"I think he hates me," she said, quietly.

"What?" he called.

"I dunno," she replied, louder this time. "I don't think he likes me." The next few minutes passed in the silence of frying food. Zane. Zane's face was angular, bordered by the shadows of unshaven stubble. His hair was perpetually tousled, and square horn-rimmed glasses stood perpetually on his nose, the vanguard of his perception. They served to elucidate, focus, and refine the world for him, so that he viewed the world as crystal clear. He tended towards black hoodies and khaki shorts; he looked like a rock-star. Aesthetically perfect! She allowed herself a tiny sigh. She was in a philanthropic mood, especially in regards to herself. She deserved it. Her night had been shit so far.

Elaine chastised herself for her shallowness with a quick swig from the cup. The liquid scalded on the way down. Zane had it in the looks department, sure, but he was smart, too. He was in her honors class after all, even though he didn't say much, he took lots of notes. And it wasn't like that was the only honors course he could have taken; that meant they had to share common tastes. Right? Barrow returned to the couch, the bowl in his hands piled high with steaming meat. It looked like ground beef, but Elaine understood that Barrow had more rarified tastes. She felt sorry for him, sometimes; Most of the time. she understood that despite all of her problems, her roommate had it particularly hard. They didn't sell his food in the grocery stores; he had to find it through alternative channels. He forked a large bite of the meat into his mouth, chewed, and swallowed before turning to her.

"Why do you think that?" he asked. Elaine retreated from his eyes, staring at the brown spot on the carpet where the previous tenant's cat had urinated on a regular basis. Her shrugged response was near imperceptible.

"Last night, I went into the campus coffee shop to pass the time between class and here," she began, relating the simple event that had cracked her prior stalwart resolve on the Zane issue into a thousand shards of brittle glass. "And he was there. And when I walked in, he just kinda got up from his seat at the triangle table, picked up his books and walked out." Barrow remained silent, forcing her to look into his face for a response. He smiled his gruesome rigor mortis grin.

"I think he just picked that time to leave," he said. He ate another bite of his breakfast.

"Yeah, because I came in." Barrow rolled his eyes.

"That's absurd," he droned. "You haven't even talked to the dude, and you're all 'Bleeeh, he hates me.' Why would he hate someone he doesn't know exists?"

"Bleh?" Elaine asked. Then quickly, "What? Exists? Thanks, that really cheers me up." She punched him lightly on the knee. Barrow laughed. "Ass."

"Anyway," he responded, "you can't really make any kind of judgment call on

this until you, oh, I don't know, talk to him for at least a few minutes. Though, frankly, I think you should just ask him out."

"I can't!" she gasped. "I barely know him." She sipped from the mug.

"Exactly the problem. Look, tell him you want to get to know him. Ask him to meet you in the coffee shop or something. What do you have to lose? If you don't, I will."

"What?"

"Yeah," Barrow said, his smile highlighting the hollows of his cheeks and adding a vicious connotation to his features. "You've made him out to be a great guy. Mr. Perfect and all. You wouldn't want to deny that to your best friend in the world, would you?" Elaine smiled slightly, turning away. She would have blushed were she still capable.

"Uhm," she stuttered, groping for a defense. "He, he only dates white zombies." Barrow stared at her for only a moment before he started laughing hysterically.

"Holy Jesus," he said, grasping his sides, "that is why I love you."

"Seriously though," Elaine stated after the laughter died down. "I swear that the next time I see him, outside of class that is, I will ask him out."

"Like on a date," Barrow said, only slightly spinning the final syllable, crafting a statement that only barely resembled a question.

"Yes," she said. "Like on a date."

It had become customary for Elaine to split the time she spent in preparation for the night between two entirely separate but almost equally pressing trains of thought. The first, and most vital was a detailed and unbiased observation of her own body; this she often began without any clothes on, her body still damp from the shower, in front of the steam-coated full-length mirror. This was a fail-proof way to start her night on ill footing, as her appearance in the glass was far more grotesque than Barrow could ever hope to be. The mirror did not show her as others perceived her, but as she truly was: a walking, rotting corpse only animated enough to perform the basest functions of life. She only relied on the mirror in regards to her hair, which it displayed more or less accurately. Her raven bob was often described as 'boyish,' and even she thought it echoed the Beatles. She never wore make-up; the close attention to the skull, skin stretched tightly where it had not rotted off all together, that stared back at her from the mirror unnerved her far too much. As a result, the blue and black bags under her eyes and the pallor of her cheeks were far more pronounced than possibly necessary. She performed further self-examination manually, the mirror a painful tool at best. She began at her feet, delicate, white, and long enough, perhaps even overly so. She liked her feet a great deal; she even enjoyed how they culminated in long but not overly long toes. She moved up legs which a razor no longer touched, smooth and thin, which of all of her body most echoed the skeletal

bones in the mirror. She paid only casual attention to her forest of pubic hair and the genitals that it served to obfuscate, as she felt it would be vulgar to dwell there. Indeed, no one got any use out of that area at all. It was bordered by her hips, which from her neckmounted vantage, seemed slightly too wide to be quite aesthetically pleasing. She knew that it was not a result of her hips actually being overly large, but rather her legs and stomach being so thin that some had referred to her as 'emaciated.' But though her belly



was thin, she quite preferred the way her stomach smoothly sloped down from her undulating ribs, accented by her petite navel, to the alternative: it was better to be too thin than too fat. *My breasts are too small. Period.* She meditated on her tiny nipples, the areolas per-

haps the size of a quarter, perhaps the size of a nickel, flat, unexciting and unresponsive. Her breasts were small, almost flat against her ribs, underdeveloped, but lacking the potential to develop further. Each night, she made the same observations; each night, she would sigh and rest her forehead against the cold mirror. After supplicating herself thus for a few minutes, she would consign herself to her closet to prepare for the night.

The second, slightly less important, stream of thoughts circled around the usefulness of her endeavors. She considered her mode of dress fairly nice; the slacks and collared, button-up shirts accentuated her boyishness, her tie pressing her sexual ambiguity as far as she was willing. The tiny crucifix cufflinks were her own little ironic statement to the world, No one has noticed them yet. but also served to distance herself from myths and superstitions. She wore deodorant, sometimes perfume. She did this to fit in, to be attractive to boys, to get a first date maybe, maybe even sex. But the verity that there may be no point in it was beginning to creep up on her. The guys she found herself longing for showed no reciprocated interest, and she saw no hope for the ones who were interested. She would have thought, considering the trends, that a gaunt, waifish girl would fascinate more boys. But they remained interested in buxom blondes and exotically tanned brunettes. Pointless! Could she even perform if one proved interested and worthy? She wasn't sure if her tongue was moist any more, much less her... other parts. She knew there were simple enough ways to test herself in these regards, but she frankly feared the outcome. It could be like sandpaper... or worse. She never licked her lips, and that was a bad sian. She was honest with herself at least.

Elaine stopped by the couch on the way out. She downed the last of the mug Barrow had made her, and took the mug to the kitchen sink, where her roommate was scrubbing the charred bits of meat left on the frying pan.

"Just set it down," he said. "I'll get it." As she dropped the mug into the dishwater, he paused his scrubbing. "I like your cufflinks," he said.

"Thanks," Elaine replied, smiling.

"I've been meaning to tell you that for a while," he groaned, returning to his crockery.

The onset of her condition had resulted in her dismissal from high school, and she had worked to get her GED before entering the local, but well-respected, college's night program. Her social circles were not greatly expanded by this late evening scholarship; most of the partakers of the night courses were older men and women who had real jobs (the nine-to-fives Elaine could never see herself fulfilling). The few people her own age took night classes for the same reason the adults did: obligation to a full-time job.

One of the few exceptions in her short history at the University was Zane. He apparently enjoyed the teacher and subject matter enough to enroll in the night class; the class's day-time slot conflicted with his music composition course. Elaine had taken up a seat in the general vicinity he haunted, but was perpetually disappointed that he sat two seats ahead of her, rather than directly before her or to either side. If he liked me, he would have sat here. She usually sated her desire for him with her eyes, slowly caressing the gentle curve of his neck with her eyes, pleasuring her sight over the stubble under his chin and slowly curling along his outer earlobe. Sometimes he would scratch his head absentmindedly as the professor droned, and Elaine would focus on those pale, thin fingers as they gyrated slowly among his tousled brown hair. His hands were wrought of Olympian perfection and forced her to rather self-consciously slip her own dreadfully inadequate extremities under her desk. She had to forcefully dismiss fantasies that the hair he spun in sensual nonchalance was her own.

She might come out of a reverie in time to field a question by the professor.

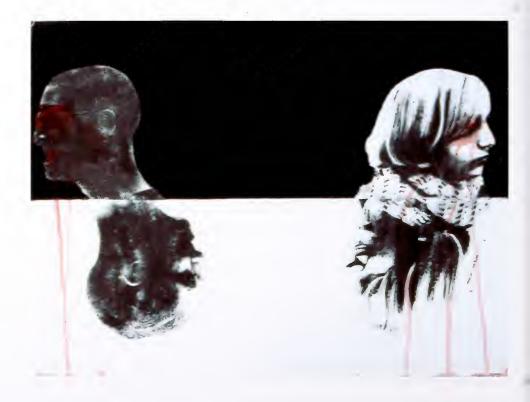
"I think that the most important statement in the poem is Emerson's thesis," she said. "Everything is connected, and it ceases to be grand or beautiful when removed from the whole, right? Objects, and by extension people, ideas, structures, art, deities, etcetera, are only given value through their relationship with other objects. In the poem, these two lines act not only as a thesis, but as a juncture between the initial idea of the poem, that each object acts independently and without concern for the other objects around it, and the second idea of the poem, that though each object moves in its individual sphere, each object is solidly, intrinsically, and inalterably connected to everything and every other object in its environment or the whole of reality. The structure of the phrases demands certain parallels to be drawn. All and nothing are immediately and interestingly contrasted. But they are similar in that they are absolutes. This defines the scope of the poem as being universal. At the end of the sentence one and alone appear parallel; these two closely related words pound home the isolation that the following sentences will portray, in Emerson's examples in proof of his thesis. The final parallel is 'fair' and 'good' which are tied to 'needed.' Obviously the world needs beauty, kindness, etcetera." The professor smiled, but Elaine had noted with dread that Zane's hand slipped upwards during the course of her answer.

"Very good," the professor said. She then acknowledged Zane's proffered hand.

"I have to say I disagree," Zane began, "as eloquently stated as it was. I think the climax of the poem is of greater importance in understanding the work as a whole. Emerson writes, 'Then I said, "I covet truth; Beauty is unripe childhood's cheat; I leave it behind with the games of youth." On the surface, he just seems to be harping on the ephemeral nature of beauty. The persona desires truth, but has found that beauty is a

'cheat' that is left behind with youth. However, the logical conclusion is that age brings about a wisdom that dismisses simple aesthetic, visual, and physical beauty. This seems to be a direct rebuff to Keats's statement 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.' He perhaps is stating that Keats may have learned the deeper wisdom of life had he lived longer. Besides that, this is a turning point in the poem. The persona realizes the destruction he has wrought on his environment and admits that he, like Socrates, knows nothing. This climactic moment leads directly to the transcendental moment at the end of the poem. By writing 'Then I said,' Emerson declares that it is the persona who has come to the realization in a very personal way, rather than some kinda preachy way, and has made the mistakes listed. The poem becomes a personal confession, so that the reader is more inclined to trust the persona when he cries that beauty is the counterfeit of youth. I feel that he goes further and claims that trust in beauty is immature in philosophical exploration." Elaine carefully examined the eraser on her desk.

"A very well articulated point, Zane," praised the professor. "A rebuke, Elaine?" Elaine shook her head, never looking up from her desk. *He's wrong*. She remained silent.



"If there's only one thing that I could teach her," the candy-haired lady said to her male companion, referring to her six-year old daughter *Who is suspiciously absent*, "if I only manage to drill one thing through her thick skull, it's that you have to drink your liquor before your beer. Do it the other way around and you're going to be the sickest you've ever been."

Elaine's feelings of guilt for eavesdropping were overwhelmed and washed over by her amusement, and she laughed softly to herself. They were only six feet away, sitting at a small round table on the far side of the single-panel glass door. Elaine's back was to them, but she felt inclined to cover her mouth as she laughed. It was something of a reflex, and she brought the lukewarm mug of coffee to her lips, allowing the brown liquid to touch only the extremity of her mouth. She wouldn't swallow, though she gave the illusion of swallowing, as she had trouble digesting coffee. It always made her sick, but she always ordered a mug to keep up appearances, if nothing else. Elaine enjoyed the coffee shop. It allowed her a scant, fleeting sense of normalcy. Almost the opposite of the grocery store, the coffee shop came with the added benefit of being inconspicuous. Nobody notices someone who's been in the coffee shop with a book and a single mug of coffee all night. Everyone notices the girl who drops the jar.

Elaine turned from them and looked out the window that her table was pressed against. Through her translucent double stood the darkness of the world. There were nights when Elaine was more comfortable inside than out, and nights when she was more comfortable outside than in. This was one of the former. Inside she could pretend it was the day. Colors were vibrant and defined, albeit with a false, manufactured look that sunlight blurred and painted over. At least that's how she remembered the day. At night, though, everything looked the same. There was variety only in the tones of gray and black, the dirty browns, navy blues, and sickly street-lamp oranges. The people on the sidewalk became more imposing; the animals in the alleys took on feral characteristics absent during the day. She became afraid of people who approached her, tensing her muscles as they passed, brushing her hand casually across her back pocket to make sure they hadn't lifted her wallet. Everything seemed more steeply posed against her at night, even though it was the only element she had left as her own. She lived in the night, but the night rejected her.

She started as a thickly calloused hand tapped on the window, leaving a greasy fingerprint on the glass. On the other side of the pane stood a slab-like figure, dressed in a trench coat and a wide-brimmed hat that cast a deep shadow over its eyes. Elaine, however, instantly recognized the figure's rictus smile. She stepped outside, leaving her coffee softly steaming on the table.

"Evening, lonesome," Barrow said as the door swung slowly shut behind her.

"Done the deed?"

"The Deed?" she asked, cocking an eyebrow. "No. I just saw him in class."

"Isn't that him?" he asked, looking pointedly towards the window. Elaine followed his gaze and found that Zane was indeed within the shop. He was talking to the girl at the counter, a thin, tan girl with pink hair and a nose-ring.

"I... must not have noticed him come in," she replied. She's so much more attractive than I am... "I was too busy eavesdropping on that pair." Elaine pointed to Candy-Head.

"Nice hair," Barrows observed. He turned from the windows, his gaze lighting on Elaine's pale features, his brown irises merging into black pupils to roughly burrow into her, to intimidate and interrogate her. "Likely story."

"Leave me alone," Elaine said, breaking away from his gaze, retreating to the cracked cement of the sidewalk, its crevasses seemingly offering her comfort in their entropic nature. His hand blocked her view, slipping beneath her chin and slowly raising it. She fought him, looking down, to the left, then the right, attempting to avoid his face. Finally, his silence drew her in, and she found herself sucked into his eyes, their brown warm and comforting like rich soil between one's toes.

"It wouldn't work out between us anyway," she muttered, shrugging her shoulders. "The only things we have in common are a love of him and a dislike of me." Barrow scowled.

"Really?" he asked. "An egocentric, then? Funny that that's not the portrait you painted of him before." Elaine's eyes darted down. "Besides, I thought we decided earlier that you can't know whether or not he likes you until you actually talk to him."

"We had an exchange in class," she admitted quietly.

"An exchange?" Barrow asked. "An exchange of what? Hostages?"

"No," she muttered. "He disagreed with me. With my fundamental interpretation of a poem."

"You must be kidding me."

"I'm not," she said in earnest. "It was like he was slowly disassembling my thoughts and discarding them." Barrow shook his head.

"What's he supposed to do, Elaine?" he asked. "Agree with whatever you say?"

"No, no," Elaine replied, shaking her head. "I mean, I understand. I'm being silly, I guess. But it just hurt. Maybe I'm afraid of him being smarter than me. No, that's not it. It just that, like if we're meant to be together, we should at least look at this poem the same way. Shouldn't we have similar outlooks?"

"Similar, perhaps," Barrow answered. "But you can't have the exact same opinions about everything. People thrive off conflict. That's how we learn and grow. If the two of you agreed about everything, the relationship would be stale and boring, and you

would both hate it." Elaine shrugged again, becoming for the first time aware of how uncomfortable Barrow's hand was on her face.

"Chin up," he said, smiling. "I'm sure you'll blow him away." Elaine sighed.

"Don't you ever think about anything else?" she asked. "Anything besides my romantic life?"

"Of course," he answered nonchalantly, "Don't you?" Elaine took a step back, shocked by the suddenness of the question.

No. A car passed, the headlights illuminated the pair for an instant.

"Yes," she said. But the pause gave her away. She was obvious to her. And it was obvious to her that she was obvious to him. Barrow shrugged, still smiling. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against him. Her hands splayed across the chest of his coat.

"That's good," he whispered into her ear. He let her go and stepped back. "Best to get all of the personal stuff sorted out first. Then you can save the world."





~fini~





# A Civie Service Announcement from Your Editor-in-Chief

Last year, *Quad* began its transformation out of akward adolescence and into sophisticated maturity. The staff and I have tried to remain true to this spirit by selecting the pieces we would like to see in a high-caliber publication. New to this year's magazine is a musical offering; we are very proud that *Quad* now features the literary, studio, and fine arts.

Without the help of my faithful (yet admittedly motley) crew, this year's publication would not have been possible. Seriously--Elizabeth was generous enough to provide the Publication Board with a copy of Quark Express (awesome), and Kathryn patiently helped me deliberate over the best pictoral accompaniment for each piece. Zac pulled several late nights fixing layout while I pulled my hair in frustration. And finally, it was through Will's flexibility (he joined the team laggate into the game) that the CD was created.

want to thank each and every one of you who submitted this year. Our goal has been to provide a reflection of the creativity and enthusiasm on campus, and without you--the writers, the poets, the painters, the musicians--we would have nothing to celebrate. On that note: KEEP SUBMITTING!

And finally, I absolutely MUST thank the following people: Libby and Sarah, Dr. Donahue, Jeff Pitts for his help scanning slides, all the wonderful ladies in the caffeteria for giving me refills on soda and coffee, Alex (for being there), and the SGA for providing us with a very nice computer, complete with CD-R drive. It's bling-bling, folks.

Obviously, a lot of work remains. And, as is always said on campus, 'the best is yet to come." Heh, heh. That mean's you better get your whip crackin', Elizabeth.

Thank you everyone for your support, faith.

Rin

### Colophon:

Quad was created using Quark Express version 4.0.

Photographs were manipulated through the digital stylings of Adobe Photoshop 7.

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